



Parliament: one of the early sessions (top); the new Parliament House.

among the local notables).

Singapore adopted a Westminster-style parliamentary system of government in which the executive branch of government is drawn from the legislative branch. The government, comprising the prime minister and Cabinet, is drawn from among the membership of Parliament instead of being elected or appointed independently. Parliament comprises the PRESIDENT and the MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT (MPs) and, for the most part, is presided over by the SPEAKER. The president's role in Parliament is limited to the delivery of the Presidential Address at the opening of Parliament when he sets out the government's policies. MPs must be: Singapore citizens aged 21 or older; listed on the current register of electors; able to communicate in one of the four official languages (English, Malay, Mandarin, or Tamil); and of sound mind.

The life of each Parliament is five years. Thereafter, Parliament must be dissolved and general elections have to be called. Parliament may, however, be dissolved any time before its five-year lifespan is up. A general election must be held within three months of Parliament being dissolved. Parliament convenes at least once a year, scheduling its meetings after the president summons the first session. At the end of each Parliamentary session, Parliament is prorogued.

Parliamentary procedure is based on the British parliamentary model. Bills are

deliberated in three readings with a committee stage between the second and third readings. A simple majority passes all Bills, except for constitutional amendments, which require a two-thirds majority of elected MPs. Only the government may introduce money bills. Once passed, a Bill becomes an Act (i.e. law) after the president gives his assent and the law is published in the Government Gazette. Before the president gives his assent to the Bill, all laws passed by Parliament must be sent to the PRESIDENTIAL COUNCIL FOR MINORITY RIGHTS for its scrutiny. If the Council gives an adverse opinion on any bill, it will not be passed into law, unless it is either modified or passed by a two-thirds majority in Parliament. Since its inception, the Council has never issued an adverse report.

MPs enjoy certain immunities and privileges in their conduct of parliamentary business. This is to ensure that members can debate freely. In addition to MPs who are elected into office, there are two other types of parliamentarians: NON-CONSTITUENCY MPs and NOMINATED MPs. Both these types of MP have the same rights and privileges as regular MPs but they are not allowed to vote on money bills, constitutional amendments, or motions of no confidence against the government.

See also ELECTIONS and POLITICAL SYSTEM.

Parsis Followers of the Zoroastrian faith, who fled from Persia (present-day Iran) in the 8th century, and settled on the west coast of India. Parsis began arriving in Singapore in the 19th century.

The first Parsi to live in Singapore was a convict named Muncherjee. When Muncherjee fell ill in 1829, an Armenian merchant persuaded Parsis living in China to purchase land for a Parsi cemetery in Singapore. Land in what is now Parsi Road was acquired for this purpose. In 1848, land adjacent to the cemetery was also acquired for a Parsi Lodge where Zoroastrian ceremonies could be held. In 1889, the Parsi Lodge Charity was started, and income from this trust was used for the upkeep of the burial ground.

The Parsi Association was established in 1954, and took over the running of the Parsi Lodge Charity. In the late 20th century, the religious needs of the community were served by Behram Vakil, a Zoroastrian priest, who died in the 1990s. Religious ceremonies such as initiations into the faith (*navjot*) were thereafter conducted by part-time priests, as well as by ordained Parsis who also held regular jobs.

One of the first Parsis to make a name for himself in Singapore was entrepreneur Cursetjee Framjee who, in 1845, was one of the founders of Little Cursetjee & Co., which eventually became the JOHN LITTLE department store. Another well-known Parsi was Navroji Mistri who came to Singapore in 1912 as an engineer to work on the building of Keppel Wharf. He stayed on after the project and eventually started the Phoenix Aerated Water Company. He also ran the well-known G.H. Café on Battery Road. In the 1950s, Mistri donated \$1 million to the paediatric wing of SINGAPORE GENERAL HOSPITAL. The wing was later named after him. Many other Parsis have contributed to Singapore's civic life and to charity, an example being orthopaedic surgeon Dr Jimmy Daruwalla, who was the founder president of the Dyslexia Association of Singapore.

Over the years, the Parsi community has grown due to the arrival of those who have moved to Singapore to work. By the early years of the 21st century, there were some 200 Parsis in Singapore.

pasar malam Malay for 'night market'. The *pasar malam* is a cluster of itinerant stalls offering food, drinks and other inexpensive products. Until the 1970s, the *pasar malam* were largely makeshift. Vendors would get together and set up shop in the evenings along a roadside, usually in the more populous PUBLIC HOUSING estates. Few of the

Parsis: priest performing the navjot, 1979.

