

## Licensing board for social workers a possibility

SINGAPORE — A licensing regime could be on the cards for social workers here as the industry takes another step towards raising professional standards.

Speaking at an event to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW), SASW president Kalyani Mehta said it would work with the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports to license the industry as its numbers and profile increase.

Said Dr Mehta: "We want a licensing board that would approve social workers so that they become licensed and can do a lot more in terms of their role in society. We would have to have a certain standard so that we are approved internationally —

so that a social worker who is licensed in Singapore may be recognised in other parts of the world."

Ms Sujeeta Menon, a social worker with the Tampines Family Service Centre, welcomed the idea.

"The prestige and status of social workers have risen over the years ... people are getting to know the real impact of social work," she said.

Dr Mehta reiterated that social workers "are professionals, they're not volunteers". Dr Mehta added: "Social workers have a lot of skills — they're not just there to save somebody but they also can plan policies, do research and be Members of Parliament, if necessary." **MONICA KOTWANI**

### ■ CASE AND STB TO JOINTLY HANDLE TOURIST COMPLAINTS

The Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE) and the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) will partner each other to handle consumer-related complaints from tourists starting from July 1 this year.

Tourist complaints currently go to STB, while CASE handles complaints from local consumers.

The partnership will see the two agencies working together to handle tourist complaints in relation to the Consumer Protection (Fair Trading) Act (CPFTA).

There will be a common database to

handle all tourist-related complaints and CASE will provide mediation on behalf of tourists as well as represent them at the Small Claims Tribunal if necessary.

Visitors from China, India, Macau and Malaysia can seek redress for their complaints even after they depart Singapore under agreements which were signed between CASE and these places. Last year, STB received 1,557 complaints from tourists.

Out of 5,726 complaints received between 2007 and last year, 37 per cent involved consumer electronics.

## Watch out for the online 'boyfriend'

### Resurgence in love scams, police warn

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SINGAPORE — Some say it is better to have loved and lost than to not have loved at all. But 19 Singaporean women who lost both money and their hearts on dating websites might disagree.

They had fallen prey to a resurgence of "Internet love scams", MediaCorp has learnt.

Between October last year and January, the women — mostly from their late 20s to their 50s as well as a 73-year-old — were cheated of S\$787,000 in total by their online "boyfriends", the police said.

The men, mostly foreigners, befriended the women through dating or social networking sites such as *be2.com*, *zoosk.com*, *tagged.com* and *wayn.com*.

After building a romance online with their victims, the fraudsters asked for money to be sent overseas for various reasons, such as being held at customs on their way to Singapore to meet the women.

One woman in her 30s lost S\$300,000 when she fell for the "marriage ruse" — her virtual boyfriend asked for a loan to process his father's inheritance and promised to come to Singapore to marry her.

Another victim, who wanted to be known only as Miss Tan, told MediaCorp in an exclusive interview that she was cheated of S\$13,000 over three months by a man she befriended last August on dating website *tagged.com*. The 40-year-old human resource manager chatted online every night, sometimes via webcam, with the so-called director of a London-based electronics firm. "I felt he was sincere and the relationship was real," she said.

He first asked if she would like to donate money to a church group in Africa. She donated about S\$200 through a remittance house.

He then asked her to invest in his company. "I did my checks and the company

existed. When I asked why his name wasn't on the board of directors, he said he was a sleeping partner and even had 'his lawyer' on the webcam," said Miss Tan.

After more than S\$10,000 was transferred, her "boyfriend" disappeared.

**After building a romance online with their victims, the fraudsters asked for money to be sent overseas for various reasons, such as being held at customs on their way to Singapore to meet the women.**

MediaCorp contacted California-based *tagged.com* (which has 100 million users worldwide) and a spokesman said it takes the issue "very seriously". "Tagged is committed to the safety and security of its users in every country and always stands ready to assist law enforcement to resolve any abuse complaints," he said.

The police believe most of the fraudsters may be African, although the women might be led to believe they are Caucasians. And enforcement is difficult when there are fake identities and personal details.

Police spokesman Deputy Superintendent Lau Kian Keong said: "Be careful when befriending strangers online. Don't put yourself in a vulnerable position or reveal personal details about yourself or transfer money to them through banks or remittance agencies."

In Singapore, matching and dating site *eSynchrony.com* only allows clients to date locally. It also blocks overseas IP addresses and requires subscribers to register with their identity card or employment pass.

## Cabby murder: Accused had second thoughts as taxis whizzed by

SINGAPORE — For 10 minutes, several taxis whizzed by China national Wang Wen-feng in the early hours of April 11, 2009. Wang, who had left his home with the intention to commit robbery, was having second thoughts.

But cabby Yuen Swee Hong, 58, stopped his taxi and asked Wang repeatedly where he wanted to go — after he did not answer the first time — before Wang boarded his taxi and allegedly took his life.

Details of the events leading up to Mr Yuen's death emerged yesterday as the police statement of the accused was submitted in court.

Wang told the police that he asked Mr Yuen to drive to Bottle Tree Village in Sembawang. On the way, he asked Mr Yuen to turn into a deserted road.

From the back seat, Wang then held

a knife to Mr Yuen's neck. According to Wang, Mr Yuen then grabbed his hand and a struggle ensued.

When Mr Yuen stopped moving, Wang alighted from the vehicle to check on the victim.

As he opened the door on the driver's side, Mr Yuen's bloodied body tumbled out. Wang then dumped the body near Sembawang Park and took the cash in Mr Yuen's shirt pocket. Wang, a delivery man who came to Singapore in 2008 to work as a carpenter, said in the statement that he only wanted to rob Mr Yuen.

He said: "I do not want to give the family of Uncle (Mr Yuen) any unanswered questions about what happened. By telling the truth is the least that I can do for Uncle and his family."

The trial continues. **ONG DAI LIN**

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