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WE SET YOU THINKING

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# Weather, crowds among factors in way of car-lite drive

FROM **CHAN CHONG LEONG**

I refer to the reports “Bike-sharing pilot to start next year in Jurong East” and “Frustrating motorists not the way to achieve car-lite society: Khaw” (both July 21).

A “car-lite” outcome is an ideal that everyone would like to see, but there is a confluence of factors that do not

encourage or facilitate the success of the concept.

First, the hot, humid and sometimes rainy weather makes cycling or walking to work impractical. Second, our roads are too narrow, with too much traffic, for cyclists and drivers to share them safely and effectively.

Third, the high population density discourages one from cycling or walking long distances. Fourth, since car owners have paid a high acquisition cost, they are motivated to maximise usage.

Fifth, the public transport system, though extensive, cannot substitute for private car ownership as far as convenience is concerned.

In other countries, the daily commute is of a greater distance relative to what most people would experience here, so taking a train is probably more convenient and faster than driving into the city for work.

In Singapore, driving outweighs using public transport in terms of convenience, and it probably takes less time to reach one’s destination.

Owing to the high density of our city traffic, bus rides take too long, with too many stops, to be an efficient mode of transport.

Finally, stressful lifestyles make time a precious commodity for many Singaporeans, who would then employ any possible means to save time. A car makes a difference in this aspect.

There is less pressure in other countries, which affords people a more leisurely commute, and public transport becomes more attractive too.

Policymakers must start thinking outside the box to find ways to encourage less usage of private cars. Increasing the cost of car ownership, however, would not help to achieve the car-lite dream. Or perhaps it is just that, a dream.

# Commitment to ‘haze-free’ palm oil should go beyond advocacy

FROM **KWAN JIN YAO**

I refer to the report “Corporate alliance aims to deliver ‘haze-free’ products” (June 28).

One might be encouraged by the Singapore Alliance for Sustainable Palm Oil’s mission: To raise awareness of the link between haze and unsustainable palm oil, and to share information on sustainable sourcing.

But the commitment to certified sustainable palm oil (CSPO) should go beyond advocacy, with more concrete indicators and targets to show, respec-

tively, how existing alliance members have made progress and how prospective members should make the switch.

To broaden the reach of the proposed advocacy, strategies could be designed and shared among firms to also educate Singaporean consumers.

Alliance members that were cited in the report — large local corporates and multinationals — have already made operational changes and have switched, or will switch, to CSPO by the end of this decade.

But it is less clear whether small and medium enterprises (SMEs) see the long-term value of such a switch or whether they can necessarily take advantage of the economies of scale their bigger counterparts enjoy.

The fact that Ikea has helped to absorb half of the cost as its suppliers move to CSPO highlights the importance of financial incentives, beyond the encouragement promised by alliance members.

Running parallel with the outreach to corporate entities could be endeavours to disseminate more public information related to CSPO, perhaps crafted with civil society or non-profit organisations.

Consumers here, unless affected directly by transboundary haze, may not be cognisant of sustainable palm oil and how the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil addresses the environmental impact of palm oil cultivation.

In the long term, greater awareness could encourage SMEs to respond too. Such pressures, in a more idealistic future, could spur more political and geopolitical action to complement these developments on the ground.

# South China Sea tensions: Are cruise ships in danger?

FROM **PHILLIP TAN FONG LIP**

In the light of the tension between claimant states regarding islands in the South China Sea, it is not unforeseeable that something untoward might happen (“Beijing to hold new drills in S China Sea; will not halt construction”; July 19).

As a fan of cruise holidays, I am concerned that cruise ships — and there are many, in view of the burgeoning cruise industry in the region, including Singapore — might one day sail unwittingly into the path of military exercises.

When tensions run high, military drills in the sea might be launched at short notice. Cruise ship captains, whose minds are engaged primarily upon charting the most economical course, might be caught off-guard. This could have dire consequences.

Moreover, what they deem a safe area to sail might not match what military commanders have been told about what is rightly their territory. This danger may lurk for years as long as rivalry prevails in the South China Sea.

Just two years ago, an ill-fated Malaysia Airlines plane was shot down while flying over Ukraine. Cruise ship captains would be well advised to be on their toes while navigating their ships.

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