

**SECOND READING SPEECH BY INDRANEE RAJAH, SECOND MINISTER
FOR FINANCE, ON THE ACRA (REGISTRY AND REGULATORY
ENHANCEMENTS) BILL ON 2 JULY 2024**

Mr Speaker, I beg to move, "That the Bill be now read a second time."

Introduction

2. The ACRA (Registry and Regulatory Enhancements) Bill aims to bolster data protection, facilitate digital communications between the Government and businesses, and enhance the regulatory framework for entities under ACRA's purview. The Bill introduces amendments to eight Acts, namely:

- a. The Accountants Act 2004;
- b. The Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority Act 2004;
- c. The Business Names Registration Act 2014;
- d. The Companies Act 1967;
- e. The Limited Liability Partnerships Act 2005;
- f. The Limited Partnerships Act 2008;
- g. The Variable Capital Companies Act 2018; and
- h. The Insolvency, Restructuring and Dissolution Act 2018.

Key Amendments Set 1 – Strengthen Data Protection

3. The first set of amendments focuses on enhancing the protection of residential addresses filed with the Registrar.

4. As the national business registry, ACRA maintains and makes publicly available information about business entities and their associated individuals, including their residential addresses, to facilitate regulatory and enforcement actions.

5. However, residential addresses can be exploited for malicious purposes, such as harassment and vice-related or loan shark activities.

6. To improve the protection of residential addresses filed with the Registrar, the Bill will mandate the filing of a contact address, alongside the residential address. The contact address must be a physical address at which the individual can be reached or contacted by post, for instance, his or her office. With this, the Registrar will make public the contact address and not the residential address. Individuals can still opt to use their residential addresses as their contact address, if they prefer.

7. Should an individual be unreachable at the contact address, the Registrar is legally empowered to make the residential address public.

8. The contact address regime differs from the existing alternate address regime in that:

- a. Under the current alternate address regime, filing an alternate address is optional and individuals have to pay a fee to file an alternate address. This alternate address will be made public, instead of the residential address.
- b. However, under the new contact address regime, the provision of a contact address is required and there will be no need for payment.
- c. With the introduction of the new contact address regime, the existing alternate address regime will be discontinued.

Transitional provisions

9. To ease transition to the new contact address regime, existing alternate addresses will automatically convert to contact addresses upon the commencement of the amended Acts.

10. For those who have not filed an alternate address and wish to use a non-residential contact address, you can update your information with ACRA at no cost. Corporate service providers should also verify their clients' preferred addresses and update ACRA accordingly. As long as the alternate addresses are filed before commencement of the amended Acts, these will be reflected as contact addresses upon commencement.

11. If an alternate address is not filed by the time of the commencement of the amended Acts, the residential address will serve as the default contact address, with the option to update at any time.

Disclosure framework

12. The Bill also introduces a new framework for differentiated information disclosure. This framework protects confidentiality of personal information by limiting public access, while still allowing selected, specified parties to access the information to fulfil their legal obligations.

13. For example, residential address will not be made publicly available by default, but certain parties, such as financial institutions, may still require the information to conduct customer due diligence checks on business entities. The Bill allows specified parties to access selected personal information to fulfil their regulatory obligations. These specified parties will be required to properly safeguard the use of such information.

Key Amendments Set 2 – G2B Digital Communications

14. The second set of amendments aims to facilitate digital communications between the Government and businesses.

15. Today, the Registrar still sends documents not in connection with court proceedings in hardcopy.

16. The Bill will empower the Registrar to collect additional information such as email addresses and mobile numbers, to enable ACRA to send secure digital communications through Bizfile, which is ACRA's business registration and filing portal. Recipients will be notified via their provided email addresses to retrieve documents on their Bizfile digital mailbox.

17. Hardcopy documents will still be sent for court proceedings.

Key Amendments Set 3 – Enhance Regulatory Regime

18. The third and final set of amendments seeks to enhance ACRA's regulatory oversight and streamline processes.

19. For instance, the Bill will allow the Registrar to obtain and use information from prescribed public agencies, reducing manual entry by users and enabling ACRA to maintain, rectify and update its registers more efficiently. This will provide greater convenience to individuals and entities.

20. In addition, the Bill will also allow the Registrar to use any information obtained from prescribed entities, such as electricity and telecommunication companies, to verify the accuracy of any document or information in ACRA's repository. This will support ACRA in performing its enforcement and regulatory functions, for instance, to detect businesses that are set up for illicit activities.

Conclusion

21. Sir, in conclusion, this Bill lays the groundwork for the enhanced Bizfile system, targeted to launch by the end of the year. These amendments will also enable ACRA to advance its regulatory framework, better protect data in its registry, and facilitate data collection and usage for regulatory needs.

22. Mr Speaker, I beg to move.