

**SPEECH BY MR TEO CHEE HEAN  
MINISTER IN CHARGE OF THE CIVIL SERVICE  
COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY  
5 FEBRUARY 2009**

Preamble

1. Mr Chairman, Sir, I would like to thank the Members for their interest in issues related to the Public Service.

Public Sector Jobs

2. Mr Teo Ser Luck has asked for the breakdown by educational qualifications of the 18,000 jobs that the Public Service said would be made available in the next 2 years. About 30% of the jobs will be for those with 'A' levels and below. The rest would require at least a Diploma qualification.

3. The jobs requiring Degree qualifications are in more specialised professions such as teachers, doctors, pharmacists and engineers. Those requiring Diploma qualification include positions such as nurses and technical officers.

4. The Singapore Armed Forces and the Home Team agencies have a range of jobs for applicants with qualifications ranging from 'A' levels or below to diploma and degree holders. There are also jobs available for those with 'A' levels or below such as Environmental Health Officer positions, and healthcare-related positions such as assistant nurses.

5. When the economy is doing well and jobs are plentiful, the Public Service, like the private sector, often faces challenges recruiting sufficient staff and retaining them. However, when jobs are not so plentiful, job seekers are more prepared to consider the merits of jobs that are available, including those in the Civil Service. The Public Service will therefore make use of this opportunity to recruit suitable applicants many of whom are needed to fill our existing vacancies in education, healthcare and other essential services. Some of these jobs will however meet new demands, for example, to improve teaching in our schools; and healthcare delivery.

6. However, I should add that notwithstanding our intention to hire more people, the public sector currently employs about 110,000 people which constitutes just about 4% of the total labour force. Hence the public sector cannot be the solution to all those who are looking for a job.

7. While we expand recruitment, I would also like to stress that the Public Service will maintain its standards in terms of hiring people with the right skills, and more importantly the right values and attitudes for public service.

## Employment and Re-employment of Older Workers

8. I will now turn to the issue on the employment and re-employment of older workers, which Mr Wee Siew Kim and Madam Halimah have raised.

9. Mr Wee Siew Kim suggested that in filling the 18,000 jobs, we consider mid career recruits and re-employ some of the older workers in the Government.

10. Our recruitment policy in the Public Service is based on merit. We look for candidates who have the relevant skills, competencies and traits that best fit the requirements of the jobs, regardless of age. We believe this approach will better meet the needs of the Public Service.

11. For the Civil Service, the number of officers who are recruited at age 40 years and above has increased from 13% of annual recruitment (or 728 officers) in 2007 to 16% of annual recruitment (or 1000 officers) in 2008.

12. Madam Halimah has asked for an update on the efforts to re-employ older workers in the Public Service. The percentage of civil servants who were re-employed at age 62 years has been steadily increasing. In 2006, the number of officers who were re-employed at age 62 years was 96 or about 53% of the number of officers who retired at age 62. This rose to 57% (or 103 officers) in 2007, and 64% (or 189 officers) in 2008. For the statutory boards, 65% of the officers (or 234 officers) who retired at age 62 years were re-employed in the same year in 2008.

13. The public sector will continue to press on with its efforts in the re-employment of older workers. In January this year, the Public Service Division issued an Advisory to public sector agencies on the best practices for re-employing retiring officers. For example, public agencies are encouraged to offer a re-employment contract of at least one year, where possible. Re-employment job arrangements may also include part-time or short term project work. In terms of wages and benefits, agencies may consider appropriate adjustments to wages, but will offer re-employed officers the same leave and medical benefit as a fresh recruit.

14. The three agencies which are piloting the implementation of the re-employment policy, that is, the Ministry of Education, the Singapore Police Force and the Ministry of Manpower, have started operationalising the best practices in the Advisory. As pilot agencies, they will help us finetune the practices.

15. I am also pleased to note that several public sector agencies have shown their commitment to the re-employment efforts by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with their respective unions, and these include AVA, BCA, DSTA, EMA, HPB, HSA, IDA, IPOS, MPA, LTA, NLB, SLA and HDB. (ie Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority of Singapore, Building and Construction Authority, Defence Science & Technology Agency, Energy Market Authority, Health Promotion Board, Health Sciences Authority,

Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, Intellectual Property Office of Singapore, Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore, Land Transport Authority, National Library Board, Singapore Land Authority, and Housing and Development Board).

16. I would like to assure Madam Halimah that the public sector takes a long term view and remains committed to the re-employment of its older officers, taking guidance from the Tripartite Committee on the Employment of Older Workers.

17. Madam Halimah has also requested for an update on our efforts to re-design jobs for officers in the Corporate Support and Operations Support Schemes. The Civil Service has been working on this in close partnership with the Unions for the past year. For a start, jobs have been re-designed for some 500 officers in three Ministries – the Ministry of Manpower, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Home Affairs. The re-designed jobs have given officers the opportunity to take on more meaningful and challenging work, and the response from officers has been positive. I met some of them myself personally. Other ministries are now starting on the same journey. In total, the job re-design effort will involve some 4,000 Corporate Support Officers and 2,000 Operations Support Officers across all our ministries.

18. The Civil Service will also design training courses and programmes that will prepare our officers for their re-designed jobs. In addition, we will also continue training officers to improve their literacy, numeracy, IT and service skills. Some of our Ministries have also taken the lead in sponsoring officers for higher-level qualifications such as polytechnic diplomas. We will be encouraging other Ministries to do the same.

#### Channels for Feedback within the Civil Service

19. Let me now move on to the point raised by Mr Baey Yam Keng on the feedback channels.

20. Civil servants have various internal channels to make their views known whether it is through their own agency's staff channels or to service-wide platforms like staff suggestions scheme. In fact, with the availability of email, as Mr Baey has pointed out, civil servants are able to share their suggestions and views with several parties within the Civil Service almost instantaneously. To further enhance existing feedback channels, we are also looking at new communication channels such as new media platforms in the government intranet. We will take into account the suggestions raised by Mr Baey.

21. Apart from providing the channels for feedback, the Civil Service encourages supervisors to be receptive and open to new ideas and staff suggestions so that staff will not be deterred from giving their honest opinions. I am also aware that it is quite common these days for the senior management in agencies including CEOs and Permanent Secretaries to have regular small group sessions with their staff. Depending on the openness of

both the management as well as of the staff themselves, views on various issues can be raised at such sessions. The experience has been mixed: some management teams are more open than others; likewise, some officers are more prepared to speak their mind than others. But we will continue to encourage more open exchanges.

### Showing Empathy and Sensitivity

22. I will now address the issue raised by Mr Wee Siew Kim. I agree with Mr Wee that public officers need to show understanding, empathy and sensitivity, especially towards Singaporeans who are going through a challenging period. All Quality Service Managers throughout the Public Service have been briefed to pay attention to this aspect of service delivery. Small efforts can make a big difference. Sometimes, by explaining schemes and initiatives more clearly, more patiently, and by offering alternatives, we can help people better understand their situation and determine the best course of action.

23. While we strive to deliver public services with sensitivity and compassion, members of the public must also appreciate that we will not be able to accede to every appeal. But rest assured that our public officers will be fair and objective, and will do their best to understand and to work alongside Singaporeans through this difficult period.

24. I would like to offer a broader perspective of what public service is. Public servants serve the public in two respects. They serve individual members of the public and must always remember that. But they also serve the public as a whole, and hence there is the wider public interest as well. So policies and laws are there to serve the wider public interest too. Traffic rules are there because they make roads safer for all members of the public. They may be inconvenient for certain individuals, but they are there to make life safer and more convenient for all. Hence, while flexibility can and should be exercised in considering the requests of individual members of the public, the interest of the wider public must also be taken into account. We will not, for example, want our roads to become less safe, or our neighbourhoods to become more tarnished by litter just because of the downturn. That would just add to the doom and gloom. In fact, if our cities remain safe, clean and secure, that would help lift the spirits of our people.

### Conclusion

25. Sir, the economic downturn presents challenging and uncertain times ahead for us. However while the downturn may pose challenges, it will also provide opportunities. During this period, the Public Service will make use of the opportunity to recruit suitable staff that it needs to build up and strengthen capacity and capabilities in the public sector. We will also continue to improve the quality of our public services in order to better serve our customers and citizens.

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