

**SPEECH BY MR TEO CHEE HEAN
MINISTER IN CHARGE OF THE CIVIL SERVICE
COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
27 FEBRUARY 2008**

Preamble

1 Mr Chairman, Sir, we have a Public Service that we can be proud of but as in any organisation, there are always areas for improvement. I thank Members who have raised various suggestions on how we can improve our service delivery or adopt good practices in the Public Service. A number of Members have spoken on this.

2 The Public Service has, over the years, placed strong emphasis on its people. Some Members have touched on Government scholarships and the need for current public sector leaders to keep in touch with the ground. Our scholarship schemes have worked well to provide a steady inflow of able and committed young persons into the Civil Service. We also have programmes to ensure that our officers, including those who have been on scholarships, will better appreciate the issues and needs of ordinary Singaporeans. This has enabled us over the years to maintain the high quality of our people to develop effective and forward-looking policies for Singapore.

3 As a responsible employer, the Public Service has, over the years, placed strong emphasis on equipping our people with the skills not only for their current jobs but wherever possible, for future challenges as well. This includes looking at ways to enhance the employability of our officers. This is of particular importance and relevance for older workers. Madam Halimah and Ms Jessica Tan have both asked for an update on the hiring and re-hiring of older workers.

Employment and Re-employment of Older Workers

4 The Public Service recognises the value of older workers. National re-employment legislation will come into effect in 2012. As a large employer, the Public Service will be at the forefront and be ready for this two years in advance, by 2010. To achieve this, the Public Service Division has been working closely with our partners in the Unions along two broad fronts.

5 First, we encourage public sector agencies to view older workers as a strategic manpower resource. Given our ageing population, there will be an increasing pool of older workers and retired public officers with a wealth of experience which we can tap on. We are studying how we can better attract and retain older workers, for example, by identifying jobs that can be performed more effectively by older workers or by introducing work arrangements that are more attractive to such workers.

6 Second, we are preparing managers, supervisors and the officers themselves for re-employment. For instance, there is a need to engage and equip older workers to manage their careers at different life stages. We need to encourage these officers to continually upgrade and equip themselves with relevant skills to remain employable.

7 In this regard, the Civil Service has introduced the Employability Skills System as a core training programme for junior officers, and reward them through the Training Incentive Scheme when they attain national-level certification. We are also redesigning jobs and providing training for our Corporate and Operations Support officers to make best use of their full potential. We want these officers, many of whom are older workers, to have skills that are relevant to the Public Service and the marketplace of the future.

8 PSD has, therefore, worked closely with the Unions to identify possible improvements and changes in our Ministries and Statutory Boards to enhance the employability and employment of older workers. For instance, there are jobs where the industry experience of mid-career recruits or institutional knowledge of retired staff can be an asset. The Ministry of Manpower is a good example in tapping extensively on the experience of mid-career recruits for jobs related to occupational safety. It has also re-employed retired staff with specialist skills to mentor and guide young officers dealing with labour relations. Public sector agencies which are involved in exporting their capability in areas such as Civil Service reforms, financial budgeting and urban planning are also increasingly tapping on their retired personnel.

9 As Madam Halimah has noted, PSD is also currently working with 3 pilot agencies – the Ministry of Education, the Singapore Police Force and the Ministry of Manpower – to establish the processes needed to ensure a smooth implementation of the Civil Service re-employment policy by 2010. Together with the Unions, we have carried out focus group discussions in the 3 pilot sites to engage and better understand the concerns of our workers with regard to re-employment. Many are open to being re-employed. A number would like to move to less demanding jobs upon re-employment. Many also expressed a preference for more flexible working arrangements such as part-time work.

10 The larger ministries like the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Education have organised pre-retirement planning seminars for their retiring officers and teachers for some years now. This is a good practice which we are extending to the rest of the Civil Service. PSD has worked with the Civil Service College and NTUC to provide pre-retirement planning courses to help public officers think ahead and plan for their lives after retirement. The first batch of participants from the pilot sites attended the pre-retirement planning course in November and December last year.

11 Thus far, the results of our efforts in hiring older workers have been modest but it is still early days. In 2007, 368 officers in their 40s were recruited into the Civil Service. This is an increase from the average number of 270 per year from 2004 to 2006. Similarly, 360 officers above 50 years old were recruited in 2007, which is an increase from the average number of 207 per year from 2004 to 2006. So we are recruiting officers in their 40s and 50s, and when we add these two numbers together, that's 728 officers, not an insignificant number. Overall, the recruitment of older workers (i.e. aged 40 years & above) comprised about 13% of the Civil Service's total recruitment in 2007, which is higher compared with 10% in 2006.

12 We have also made some progress in re-employment in the Civil Service. In 2007, the number of officers who were re-employed at age 62 years was about 57% of the number of officers who retired at age 62. This is a 4%-point increase compared with 53% in 2006. In addition, many retired officers are engaged on short-term assignments on a contract-for-service basis. More than 1,100 retired officers were hired on this mode in 2007.

13 PSD will continue to push ahead with our efforts, taking guidance from the Tripartite Committee on Employability of Older Workers.

Work-Life Harmony

14 Madam Halimah also asked for an update on work-life initiatives in the Public Service.

15 The Public Service recognises that enhancing employees' work-life harmony would lead to better individual and organisational performance.

16 Every public agency now has a Work-Life Advocate and Work-Life Ambassador. The Work-Life Advocate is a champion who takes steps to ensure

that good work-life practices are in place in the agency. In a Ministry, this appointment is held by the Deputy Secretary and in a Statutory Board, typically by the Deputy CEO. The Work-Life Ambassador is an officer whose main job responsibility is to promote and facilitate the day-to-day work-life programmes in his agency, and such programmes can be as basic as helping officers to improve their communications with their staff, less misunderstood instructions, less stress, and thereby easing their workload.

17 Centrally, PSD will also set up communities of practice to share best practices across ministries. Today, civil servants can already opt for several forms of flexible work arrangements, like part-time work and telecommuting. We will explore how we can fully utilise such flexibility.

18 Our employees also have to play their part. We have thus also introduced training programmes to help our officers prioritise work and personal demands. There will also be programmes to help enhance individual resilience in meeting life challenges, as well as to build a supportive work environment with co-workers.

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