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TODAY

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Dear Editor

I refer to the letter, "What are the civil servants' real gripes?" by Mr Joseph Khoo (TODAY, March 7, 2007). Mr Khoo asked whether insufficient pay was the key reason for resignations in the civil service, and whether there were other more cost-effective ways to reduce turnover apart from raising the salaries of civil servants.

We agree with Mr Khoo that salaries are not the sole factor to attract and retain talent. There are other equally important considerations such as job challenge, career progression, development opportunities and effective leadership.

These are areas that the Civil Service has been continually working on to strengthen and enhance. We will continue to look at ways to provide challenging and fulfilling careers for all civil servants, including increasing opportunities for officers to be rotated among different jobs.

According to a study released by Hewitt Associates in 2006 titled 'Taking Your Talent Pulse', pay ranks second on the list of motivators for high potential employees as this sends a clear signal that they are valued and rewarded for their contributions. The top motivator is job challenge.

Nonetheless, as private sector wages rise, the wages of civil servants cannot remain stagnant. While the Civil Service does not aim to lead private sector salaries, we need to keep pace. Otherwise we will lose our ability to recruit and keep good officers.

The resignation rate in the Civil Service has increased, from an average of 4.8% in 2005 to 5.7% in 2006. Some parts of the civil service are facing much higher attrition.

For example in the Management Executive scheme which is for graduate officers, resignation rate has risen from 7.4% in 2005 to 10.6% in 2006. The resignation rate is highest at the entry level grade, at 25%.

Some segments of the Service are feeling the competition more than others. For example, 42% of accountants who left during the past year, cited better pay and prospects in the private sector.

About 46% of the officers in the Legal Service, who resigned over the same period, were either paid or expected to be paid higher remuneration packages, with some getting more than 30% pay increase upon joining the private sector.

I wish to reassure Mr Khoo that the Government is mindful of its responsibility to be prudent in its use of resources. There will not be a uniform, across-the-board large revision in Civil Service salaries. Those services which are lagging significantly behind the market are likely to receive larger adjustments.

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