How to balance expectations of multiple bosses

askST Jobs

Manpower reporter Tay Hong Yi offers practical answers to candid questions on navigating workplace challenges and getting ahead in your career. Get more tips by signing up to The Straits Times' HeadSTart newsletter.

Q *I report to multiple leaders at work. How do I effectively balance what they each want from me?*

A It is becoming increasingly typical for employees to report to more than one boss, says Dr David Leong, managing director of PeopleWorldwide Consulting.

Those in larger multi-nationals may even have to report to different bosses across geographical boundaries, he adds.

Organisations may opt for a reporting structure with multiple leaders to encourage collaboration across functional lines, tap a wide range of skills and guarantee that projects benefit from a variety of views.

"When it comes to handling difficult issues, this configuration has the potential to result in more creative ideas and a more comprehensive approach," says Dr Leong.

Mr Linus Choo, regional executive director of executive search firm Ethos BeathChapman, also notes that employees, especially promising talents, may be expected to liaise with multiple stakeholders due to projects or assignments that straddle different business functions or regions.

"In such a system, it is probably more efficient to have the individual report to multiple leaders, though ideally not more than three to be efficient, as a key project manager who is the subject-matter expert."

Such a set-up enables quicker decision-making, especially in dynamic situations, Mr Choo notes, adding: "Employees are able to see the bigger picture instead of operating in silos."

Someone placed in this situation needs to be comfortable with each boss having different expectations, communication styles and timelines, which need to be prioritised, he says.

Dr Leong notes that such workers must be comfortable with ambiguity, as they may be dealing with conflicting instructions and orders from different bosses with overlapping deadlines.

"In order to properly coordinate work, you will need to be able to handle competing priorities and have a solid understanding of the strategic requirements of each leader," he says, a process that entails clear communication that establishes expectations.

"Please keep each leader up to date on your progress and workload on a regular basis."

Meanwhile, leaders should work together to coordinate their calls for action and deliver consistent feedback, Dr Leong advises.

"Regular check-ins, online or face-to-face, are beneficial for both talents and bosses since they ensure alignment and allow for the resolution of any issues or overlaps in expectations that may arise."

For their part, talents should prioritise jobs according to their level of significance and urgency, and convey their ability in an open and honest manner.

Dr Leong notes: "When you are talking about your workload, you should frame it in terms of how it affects the quality and timeliness of your production, raising conflicts of interests or overlapped deadlines so that they can be resolutely resolved (in a way) that would not compromise work output.

"This will prevent you from giving the impression that you are avoiding an obligation, or fail to deliver because of a compressed timeline."

For instance, he suggests that employees may candidly state their current workload and timeline, framing it as an effort to determine whether they will be able to give this project the attention it requires.

While it is a possibility that this reporting arrangement is a cost-cutting measure by pushing someone to cover work that should be spread across multiple others, Mr Choo says this is more likely meant to groom promising talent.

"As you interact with more stakeholders on a daily basis, it offers you a chance to implement change across different business units, and also allows stakeholders to provide you with endorsements, which is important since you probably require visibility during promotion cycles in multi-nationals," he adds.

Mr Choo also says that as long as the scope of work is defined well, someone should know the work that is not essential or pressing.

"In that instance, if you are a talent put in that position, you should learn to speak up, push back or put out a holding response to buy you some time to work on non-prioritised tasks."

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Fed dials back rate-cut outlook, but markets stay upbeat

Markets are starting to look beyond rates and will pull higher, albeit in choppy fashion

Market Watch



Ven Sreenivasan
Senior Columnist

Markets have continued marching northwards despite US Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell suggesting there could be no rate cuts in 2024.

On Wall Street, the Nasdaq notched up five straight new record highs even as the US central bank last week kept its Fed funds rate unchanged at 5.25 per cent to 5.5 per cent – its highest levels in 23 years.

This is in spite of the latest US consumer price index and producer price index easing in May, suggesting that inflation could indeed be stabilising at lower levels.

Although the heavyweight Dow Jones Industrial Average slipped 0.54 per cent for the week to 38,589.16, the broad-based S&P 500 gained 1.58 per cent to a record 5,431.60. Meanwhile, the continuing artificial intelligence-driven tech boom drove the Nasdaq up 3.24 per cent to 17,688.88.

The Straits Times Index (STI) ended the week at 3,297.55, a 1 per cent decline. This reduces the STI total return year to date to 4.6 per cent. Three index stocks that booked gains on the week were Yangzijiang Shipbuilding (up 1.7 per cent), Singtel (up 1.2 per cent) and Jardine Cycle & Carriage (up 0.6 per cent). The 27 STI decliners on the week were led by Thai Beverage (down 5.9 per cent), Hongkong Land (down 5.7 per cent) and City Developments (down 3.5 per cent).

Interestingly, despite last week's slide, the Singapore market saw a turnaround from being one of the worst performers in Asean to outperforming regional markets such as Thailand and Indonesia. Trading volumes have picked up somewhat over the past four weeks.

Mr Thilan Wickramasinghe, regional head of equity research at Maybank Securities, attributes this to the fact that Singapore has traditionally outperformed during times of high interest rates.

"We have a lot of interest rate-sensitive sectors on our index, like the banks," he said.

"Back in January the market was expecting five to six Fed rate cuts for this year, starting in March. Fast-forward, and today these expectations have dwindled down to one or maybe no cuts.

"While the US will grind higher despite the higher-for-longer rates expectations, we are seeing rotational investment flows back to Singapore, given its defensive and low debt market composition. We think Singapore will outperform, and have actually raised our STI target for this year by 8 per cent to 3,583 to reflect our bullish outlook."

On the broader front, market experts also note a potential currency impact arising from interest-rate differentials around the world. While the Fed remains in hawkish mode, the euro zone, Canada, Latin America and other markets are seeing a subtle but real shift towards the start of a broader easing cycle.

This could cause currency volatility worldwide.

Mr Neeraj Seth, BlackRock's chief investment officer and head of Asia-Pacific fundamental fixed income, wrote that Asian central banks have broadly resisted cutting interest rates despite domestic inflation being well under control, or below target in many cases, out of concern that too great an interest-rate differential with the US would result in excessive currency weakness.

"These fears are valid, but for fixed-income investors, it means Asian bonds continue to be attractive diversifiers for global portfolios, as local yields remain higher than they otherwise might be (relative to inflation), with currencies that are quite stable," said Mr Seth.

"Cross-border equity investors should take hedging measures to mitigate their currency risks as interest-rate differentials intensify."

So what next?

The future path of Fed policy will be heavily influenced by upcoming economic data. Investors should keep a close eye on reports related to US employment, inflation and economic growth to anticipate potential shifts in the Fed's stance.



The US central bank kept its Fed funds rate unchanged at 5.25 to 5.5 per cent, in spite of the latest US consumer price index and producer price index easing in May, suggesting inflation could be stabilising at lower levels. PHOTO: REUTERS

Despite Mr Powell's utterances that the Fed can engineer a soft landing for the US economy, there are some strategists who fear that after two years of high interest rates, the economy could be headed for a moderate recession rather than a soft landing.

Higher-for-longer rates could ultimately impact corporate earnings and consumer balance sheets, especially for those with outstanding credit. Consumer spending has been the biggest engine driving the US domestic economy. The latest University of Michigan survey of consumers showed sentiment declined to 65.6 in June, down from 69.1 in May.

That said, indications are that markets are starting to look beyond interest rates and will pull higher in 2024, albeit in choppy fashion. Besides data flows, the big event to watch in November is the US presidential election. The policies of whoever sits in the White House will have a huge impact on market sentiment.

For Singapore, the market outlook appears benign.

The latest second-quarter corporate results have been generally good, with overall earnings up 8.3 per cent – the fastest rise since the second quarter of 2023. We also saw net profit margins rebound to around 14 per cent, the highest since the second quarter of 2017.

"These readings show that Singapore companies are adapting well to the high interest rate and input cost environment," said Mr Wickramasinghe. "Nearly a third of our coverage companies reported better-than-expected earnings, while the proportion of disappointments fell to 16 per cent, versus 22 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2023. The number of stocks where our analysts cut earnings forecasts fell to 17 per cent, compared with 44 per cent."

Indeed, as I have mentioned before in this and other columns, many Singapore mid-caps remain undiscovered gems, reporting strong earnings, paying good dividends and with good forward growth prospects. Most have low or negligible debt, which means interest rates do not come into play.

The STI is now trading at a very cheap 10 times price-earnings multiple, while expectations are bottoming out in terms of bad news for companies.

Aviation services player Sats is a case in point. Not only did the company see a sharp turnaround for the full year that ended in March after consolidating contributions from its European acquisition Worldwide Flight Services, but it also resumed paying dividends.

Its forward projections continue to look strong, thanks to the recovery in aviation and air logistics.

Meanwhile, the Fed's position on rates will continue to dominate headlines, going forward.

Mr Vasu Menon, managing director for investment strategy at OCBC Bank, reckons that putting aside the volatility, markets have actually done well so far in the first half of 2024 despite investors' fixation with Fed rate cuts.

"What has come through clearly in the latest rate-setting meeting is that the Fed seems confident that disinflation will allow it to undertake four rate cuts in 2025 and 2026, even if 2024 seems uncertain," he said.

The takeaway for investors is that while there will be volatility, the market uptrend remains intact. The tech-led rally could spread to other segments of the market. Also, there is a lot of cash on the sidelines to fuel the market's rise when rates start coming down.

Besides the Fedspeak by various governors, the big data to watch next week will be US retail sales, industrial production, initial jobless claims, existing home sales and US economic indicators.

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SINGAPORE

Reasons for burnout

27% Too much work

16% Too many personal demands

13% Lack of recognition

9% Worries about losing jobs or lack of support for work



The survey findings point to the growing risk of burnout among workers and a need for greater mental health support, said Telus Health, which polled 1,000 workers across a range of industries, including health and social services, public administration and defence, as well as manufacturing and construction. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

Exhausted from work? Nearly half of S'pore workers surveyed feel the same

Those under 40 are three times more likely to feel extremely burnt out than workers over 50

Ian Cheng
Correspondent

Nearly half of the workers in Singapore feel exhausted after a day at work, a recent survey by a health technology provider has shown.

The survey by Telus Health polled 1,000 workers across a range of industries, including health and social services, public administration and defence, as well as manufacturing and construction.

The findings point to the growing risk of burnout among workers and a need for greater mental health support, said the firm.

The report, which was released on June 13, showed that 47 per cent of the workers in Singapore feel mentally or physically exhausted by their work.

Exhaustion is one of the three main symptoms of burnout, which is also characterised by diminished performance and cynicism, said Telus Health's director for Asia, Mr Haider Amir.

The study showed that two-thirds of the workers here have at least one of these three indicators of burnout, with those under the age of 40 being three times more likely to feel extremely burnt out than workers over 50.

The same group was also nearly twice as likely as workers over 50 to find it difficult to be motivated to do their work.

Workers said the top reason for burnout was having too much work – this was cited by 27 per cent of respondents.

Other reasons include having too many personal demands (16 per cent), a lack of recognition (13 per cent) and worries about losing their jobs or lack of support for their work (9 per cent).

The data was gathered from an online survey conducted in April, said Telus Health, adding that respondents were employed within the last six months and also representative of the population.

The company releases such reports monthly, with each examining different aspects of work, such as culture and performance, in relation to health and productivity.

Telus used the data to come up with its April iteration of its Mental Health Index, which looked at workers' attributes including work productivity, anxiety, isolation, depression, optimism, psychological health and financial risk with relation to burnout and motivation to work.

All mental health attributes, apart from anxiety and financial risk, declined from January 2024.

Launched in 2022, the index measures the current mental health status of employed adults, and is meant to help businesses and governments to gauge the need for mental health support and predict risks to cost and productivity.

While the mental health score of workers in Singapore has improved over the last two years, the average score still reflects a "highly stressed society".

The survey also showed that over two in five workers found it difficult to be motivated to do their work, with 26 per cent of the respondents stating that this was largely because they did not feel valued.

Other reasons include distractions due to personal issues or too much change at work (both at 19 per cent), finding work boring (13 per cent) and conflict with colleagues (9 per cent).

Mr Haider said the report highlights "a pressing need for employers to prioritise mental health support".

The survey comes at a time when mental health is becoming a growing issue of concern following the Covid-19 pandemic, and a bigger priority on the national agenda.

Yet the survey showed that 52 per cent of the workers polled reported that their workplaces did not offer mental health programmes such as free confidential counselling, coaching and well-being services to help them cope with work demands.

A quarter of the workers were unsure if their employers had these programmes.

Experts agreed that the report underscores the urgent need for employers to recognise and address the mental and physical well-being of their employees.

Dr John Shepherd Lim, chief well-being officer of the Singapore Counselling Centre, said prolonged burnout that is not addressed can lead to clinical depression and anxiety disorders.

"Neglect of burnt-out workers can come at a very high economic cost in terms of lost productivity and increased medical cost in the long run," he said.

PeopleWorldwide Consulting's managing director David Leong said workers find themselves exhausted because they are unable to disconnect from work after a workday.

Smartphones and an "always on" work culture pressure employees to be available and responsive after hours, he said.

"It not only impacts employees' mental and physical health but also reduces productivity, increases absenteeism, and leads to higher turnover rates," said Dr Leong.

He added that organisations should take proactive steps to create healthier work environments by regularly assessing and managing employees' workloads, offering flexible work arrangements and providing mental health support such as counselling services and wellness programmes, among other things.

Mr Paul Heng, founder and executive coach of NeXT Career Consulting Group, Asia, also urged workers to take ownership of their mental health.

Workers should not compromise their mental health over their jobs, he said, urging people not to be concerned with the stigma of mental problems and to seek help.

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Tengah • Ride-hailing firm's mapping initiative aims to aid accessibility | **A18**



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Online



FEATURE

Arthritis at 2?

Juvenile idiopathic arthritis or JIA is a chronic autoimmune condition in which the body's immune system attacks its own healthy cells and tissues, resulting in inflammation in the joints. It can affect kids from six months to 16 years old.

str.sg/feature-joints

How to resign from a job as a first-timer?

askST Jobs

Manpower reporter Tay Hong Yi offers practical answers to candid questions on navigating workplace challenges and getting ahead in your career. Get more tips by signing up to The Straits Times' HeadSTart newsletter.

Q *I'm about to resign from my job for the first time. How do I broach the topic?*

A The first person workers should share their intention with is their direct supervisor, before informing human resources.

"This allows for a direct and professional conversation about the decision to resign," says Ms Loh Kaili, associate director for human resources and corporate services at BTI Executive Search.

She adds that the conversation should be undertaken in a private setting and you should take a diplomatic and professional approach during the discussion.

If the manager is unavailable due to travel abroad, a pre-arranged call works too, says Ms Huang Ailing, executive director and practice lead for energy and commodities at executive search firm Kerry Consulting.

Workers angling to leave should state their intentions clearly in the initial conversation, she adds.

Ms Huang also suggests they express gratitude for the learning opportunities received, reassure the manager that the decision to leave is based on personal growth and not due to any negative feelings, clearly state the decision is final, and commit to a smooth handover.

Ms Loh notes that workers need to be mentally prepared for their managers to issue a counter-offer during the conversation, and stand firm if their mind is made up.

A counter-offer is rarely worthwhile.

Ms Loh advises employees to avoid criticising the company or sharing too much about their next move, though they can offer constructive feedback or provide solutions the company can consider.

Dr David Leong, managing director of PeopleWorldwide Consulting, suggests workers specify the day they intend to leave, which should ideally provide adequate notice according to the employment contract or employer policies.

"Prepare yourself for the possibility that your employer will inquire as to the reason for your departure and whether there is anything they could do to convince you to change your mind," he adds.

Comments about any specific co-worker in the offered feedback should also omit the co-worker's identity, Dr Leong advises.

Ms Huang also advises workers to refrain from requesting that their notice period be shortened "in an abrasive or abrupt manner", particularly in the first resignation meeting.

"Such requests should be approached delicately and ideally discussed in a follow-up meeting."

On hinting about plans to quit before tendering the resignation, Ms Loh says that in most cases, it is advisable for employees to keep their plans confidential until they are ready to have the official conversation with the supervisor.

"However, talents may also choose to speak with a trusted human resources (employee) who can be helpful to address the issue or explore potential solutions before the talent makes the final decision.

"If the talent is sitting on the fence, it is recommended to have this conversation early with line managers so they can propose alternatives to retain the talent."

Dr Leong says: "Unwanted dynamics or demands in the workplace can be brought about by announcements made too soon."

After the resignation is tendered, he suggests workers finish current projects, help with the transition and make a good impression on the people they are leaving behind.

"To ensure a seamless transition of responsibilities, (the notice period) is an excellent moment to document your work and possibly provide training to a colleague or another individual who will succeed you.

"Remember, this is a job and nothing more. To reach the extent of acting out violently or uncooperatively only invites more trouble, implicating security (staff) and escorted departure. It is unnecessary.

"Ensure that the departure, notwithstanding the reasons, be on good terms, at least professionally."

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Rex executive chairman John d'Abo said oil will likely decline in demand in the years to come, so diversifying into other areas offering growth might pay dividends in the future. In the short term though, he remains optimistic that oil and gas can still deliver value, adding that there will still be a need for oil in 10 to 15 years. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

Rex diversifies business but banks on oil, gas for short-term value

S'pore-listed company bets on drones, medical tech for future growth as fossil fuels phase out

Company Watch



Sue-Ann Tan
Business Correspondent

Singapore-listed oil and gas company Rex International is investing in drones and medical technology, betting that these new sectors will offer future growth as fossil fuels are gradually phased out in the transition to a greener planet.

Rex executive chairman John d'Abo told The Straits Times that oil will likely decline in demand in the years to come, so diversifying into other areas offering growth might pay dividends in the future.

The company is investing in Xer Technologies, which provides drones that can be used for inspections and monitoring gas emissions.

"Putting small investments into companies in potentially very large sectors was the thinking behind our diversification," Mr d'Abo said.

"We do not want to change the risk profile of the company at all. But we want to have majority stakes in areas where we can help drive growth, where we can see that we can create shareholder value in a relatively short space of time."

Another alternative investment for Rex is in medical technology, specifically in cancer therapy.

It has invested in Moroxite T, a Sweden-incorporated medical technology company that is developing a new system for the targeted delivery of anti-tumour drugs.

"Cancer therapy is a massive sector. Shareholder value can be created quickly, even in terms of pre-revenue through the filing and award of patents within that area," Mr d'Abo said.

"We're not dedicating a lot of money to alternative investments, but we want to keep our fingers in the game... and see how they develop over the course of time," he said. "We do recognise that oil won't be around in 50 years' time for sure."

In the short term though, Mr d'Abo remains optimistic that oil and gas can still deliver value.

With geopolitical tensions brewing in the Middle East, oil prices have risen in recent months, and are predicted to hold above US$80 a barrel in 2024.

Mr d'Abo said: "Part of the whole process of being a listed company is to create value for shareholders, and we do believe that there is still significant upside for the company in the oil and gas business.

"While there is clearly recognition that it is a sunset industry in the longer term, for now the major focus clearly is still on gas."

Rex is in the business of oil and gas exploration and production. It is active in areas like Norway, where it has interests in two oil-producing fields Brage and Yme. Its Norway subsidiary and partners on April 30 submitted a plan for field development work at the Bestla field in the North Sea.

Rex is also drilling for oil in Oman and plans to file a field development plan in 2024 for its newest field in Benin, West Africa.

Mr d'Abo said: "There's optimism that we can certainly add reserves and Benin has the most obvious potential.

"We have got oil reserves of about nine million barrels in combination from Oman and Norway. Just looking at the current oil price, we know that points to quite significant revenues in the coming years."

He added that Rex is also sitting on an estimated 16 million barrels of oil resources in Norway.

"We hope to make progress in Norway. We are hopefully going to add reserves and give greater clarity on the future earnings of the business because once we've got a field development plan in there, we can start to forecast the revenues of the various wells that we drill."

In general, he added that the oil price remains high and that peak oil – the estimated time that global crude oil production reaches its maximum rate – seems further away, which contributes to his optimism.

He added that there will still be a need for oil in 10 to 15 years, and Rex is focused on trying to extract the oil as economically as it can.

The company noted in a statement in February that 2023 saw an overall increase in oil production in Norway, which raised revenues.

However, this was partially offset by a drop in the volume of oil extracted and sold from the Yumna Field in Oman due to production stoppages for the maintenance of facilities and other operational issues.

For the financial year ended Dec 31, 2023, Rex's revenues increased by 22 per cent to US$207.02 million (S$280 million), up from US$170.26 million in 2022.

However, the company posted a loss after tax of US$69.4 million, as compared with profit after tax of US$350,000 in 2022, owing to higher depletion rates at its oil fields during the period.

Rex was trading at 12.6 cents on May 10, down by more than 30 per cent since the start of 2024. At those levels, the company has a market value of over $160 million.

Analysts appear divided on the stock though, with one forecasting that it could reach a target price of 32 cents within the next 12 months. In contrast, another analyst had a target price of just 8 cents on the stock.

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News analysis

Chandra Asri's purchase of Shell Singapore refinery brings scale, risk

While Chandra Asri's deal to buy Shell's Singapore refinery will see it join the ranks of South-east Asia's largest petrochemicals players, it is taking on the risk of running an ageing facility in a highly competitive sector.

In taking over Shell's Bukom facility, which dates to 1961, Indonesia's Chandra Asri Pacific will acquire an asset that is less efficient than more modern plants, but which gives it a second naphtha cracker, expands its product portfolio and renders plans to build a greenfield complex in its home country unnecessary, analysts and industry insiders said.

Owning a refinery for the first time will also give Chandra a ready source of feedstock, from crude oil facilitated by Swiss trading house Glencore, its minority partner in the deal, which can help sell its products into global markets.

"Glencore as its partner means Chandra Asri can harness this trading giant's strengths in not only the trading sphere but also on the logistical front," said Mr Salmon Lee, head of polyester at Wood Mackenzie.

"It's a very significant step in Chandra Asri's stepping up its game in the increasingly competitive petrochemical industry," he added.

The companies did not disclose the value of the deal, but brokerage Jefferies estimated sale proceeds of US$300 million (S$406 million) to US$500 million.

Shell in 2023 invited more than a dozen companies, including numerous Chinese petrochemicals firms, to look at its Bukom assets in a process managed by Goldman Sachs, sources have said, with Chandra Asri one of the earliest to show interest.

The purchase, to close by year end, will give Chandra Asri nearly two million tonnes per year of ethylene capacity, leapfrogging it into South-east Asia's top three, according to Reuters calculations, behind Thailand's PTT Global Chemical and Siam Cement Group's facilities in Thailand and Vietnam.

Chandra Asri had planned a second Indonesian cracker with a target start-up date of 2026 to 2027, but industry sources said the acquisition of Shell's cracker offered a cheaper option in a high-cost environment.

"We see a possibility that Chandra Asri may no longer proceed with its plan to build a second Indonesia cracker project given the geographical diversification after merger and acquisition," Citi analyst Oscar Yee wrote.

Asked about its previous expansion plan, Chandra Asri told Reuters: "As an integral part of our growth strategy, we actively seek opportunities to build partnerships with diverse entities, both to nurture organic business and pursue strategic M&A."

With the Bukom purchase, Chandra will steal a competitive march on rival Lotte Chemical Indonesia's planned one million ton per year cracker, expected to come online in mid-to-late 2025.

However, the ageing Singapore plant brings challenges, given an industrywide squeeze on petrochemical margins.

Most steam cracker operator margins in Asia, excluding China, were negative in 2023, with an upturn likely only in 2028, Wood Mackenzie calculations show.

A September report by the consultant said Bukom was the weakest integrated refinery-petrochemical site in Shell's portfolio, with integrated net cash margins below the global weighted industry average of US$14 a barrel.

North-east Asian plants making naphtha-based monoethylene glycol, a major product at Shell's site, averaged losses of US$94 a ton in 2022 and 2023 due to overcapacity and weak China demand, said analyst Ann Sun from market intelligence firm ICIS.

Singapore is also set to increase its carbon emissions tax from $5 a tonne now to $25 in 2024-2025, $45 in 2026-2027 and $50-$80 by 2030, which analysts say could add millions of dollars to refiners' costs. REUTERS

Apple tops ranking of S'pore's best employers

Survey finds dissatisfaction with work-life balance a main reason why staff leave firms

Rosalind Ang

Dissatisfaction with work-life balance is a main reason why employees leave an employer, while salary has become a more important factor for employees, according to the results of a survey published on April 30.

Technology giant Apple came in first on a list of the top 250 Singapore's Best Employers among companies and institutions with at least 200 employees here, the survey released by The Straits Times and global research company Statista found.

Google, another tech giant, came in second, followed by Asia Pacific Breweries Singapore (Heineken Asia Pacific), German multinational enterprise Siemens and Motorola Solutions Singapore.

More than 14,000 employees from over 2,000 employers in 27 industry sectors responded to the online survey conducted in September and October 2023.

The survey scored employers based on two elements – each employee's willingness to recommend one's own employer, and their willingness to recommend other employers in their industries.

The highest overall scores were reached by employers from the clothing, biotechnology and food industries.

An improvement, especially in aspects such as work atmosphere and development potential, is noticeable in fast-moving consumer goods companies and the travel and service sector.

This might be linked to the general recovery of those sectors: The travel economy is rising back to its pre-pandemic levels, and demand for and supply of goods are rebounding, said Ms Jana Meusel, team lead for employer analysis at Statista R.

The survey found that the more satisfied employees were with their work-life balance, the more willing they were to recommend their employers to others.

The greater emphasis on work-life balance is partly due to the growth of digital connectedness, which has made it simpler today to intrude into personal time, said Dr David Leong, managing director of human resources advisory firm PeopleWorldwide Consulting.

"As a consequence, it has become increasingly important to set formal boundaries between one's personal life and professional life," he said.

The Covid-19 pandemic also brought to light the significance of adaptability, as well as the possibility of maintaining production through the utilisation of flexible scheduling, said Dr Leong.

"As a consequence of this, workers strive for companies which respect and encourage a healthy work-life balance between their personal and professional lives than those which do not," he said.

In the survey, the highest improvement was observed in the evaluation of a company's image, measured via items such as "I am proud of the product/service that my company produces/offers".

Overall, the image of an employer received the best evaluation from respondents in terms of employer attractiveness, with high-scoring companies coming especially from the food industry and real estate. For most of the industries, this was the best-evaluated dimension, according to the survey results.

Development potential was among the lower-scoring aspects of employer attractiveness, the survey found. This accompanies the global trend of increasing dissatisfaction with such things as on-site training programmes, said Ms Meusel.

The Future Of Jobs Survey (2023) by the World Economic Forum showed that investing in learning and training on the job is among the top strategies of companies regarding their staff, she added.

Dr Leong said the appearance of lower scores in development potential may not necessarily be a trend that has been going on for a long time, but it may be influenced by a number of factors that have emerged in recent times.

"The discontent with on-site training may have been caused by changes in the dynamics of the workplace, such as the widespread adoption of remote work, which may have resulted in a reduction in the number of possibilities for hands-on training," he said.

Businesses need to continuously adapt to withstand the effects of economic unpredictability and rapid technology advancements. This may result in a lack of training that sufficiently prepares employees for positions that are always evolving, he added.

As a result, businesses may now need to invest more in comprehensive and adaptable training programmes that address existing skill gaps and anticipate future requirements, said Dr Leong.

The survey also found that salary has become a more important factor worldwide for employee satisfaction following uncertainties arising from the pandemic and following inflation, said Ms Meusel.

The survey of Singaporean employees showed a similar trend: The correlation between the satisfaction with salary, received benefits and the satisfaction with the employer has increased compared with the previous year.

A purpose in one's job and diversity, especially among young employees, have also become more important in the future job world, said Ms Meusel.

Said Dr Leong: "In order for businesses to maintain their competitive edge in the ever-changing labour market, they will need to align themselves more closely with the values and expectations of the younger workforce."

"For example, this could mean providing salaries that are competitive in the market, as well as distinct professional development routes that create a feeling of purpose and progression," he said.

The Lego Group, which came in at No. 8 on the list of Singapore's best employers, offers staff a place where they can unleash their creativity and imagination, said Ms Amrita Singh, its head of people-partnering for the Asia-Pacific and Singapore hub.

"Play is synonymous with our brand, and we are constantly finding new ways to uniquely integrate play into the work we do every day," she added, of the maker of the colourful toy bricks.

Dr Leong said that the promotion of diversity and inclusion not only increases the social footprint of a firm, but also facilitates the development of a supportive and inventive culture in the workplace, which in turn attracts a wider variety of job seekers.

"To attract talent that places a high value on flexibility and a healthy work environment, employers may also need to make use of technology and implement rules that allow for flexible work arrangements."

Said Mr Ben King, managing director of Google Singapore: "Being recognised as one of Singapore's best employers for the fifth year is an incredible honour."

Besides giving employees the autonomy to manage their time and environment, Google Singapore also holds regular town halls and podcasts with senior leaders to engage in open dialogue, and for them to share their personal reflections on the business to build trust and connection with other colleagues.

"We also regularly check in through pulse surveys and conversations to better understand the employees' experiences and thoughts on productivity and well-being," said Mr King.

"Our people remain our No. 1 asset, and their satisfaction has a direct impact on our growth and success as a company."

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SCAN TO READ
Explore the full list of Singapore's top employers:
https://str.sg/BestEmployers2024

THE STRAITS TIMES
Singapore's Best Employers 2024
statista

Singapore's Best Employers 2024

Rank	Employer
1	Apple
2	Google
3	Asia Pacific Breweries Singapore (Heineken Asia Pacific)
4	Siemens
5	Motorola Solutions Singapore
6	Agilent Technologies Singapore
7	Starbucks Coffee Singapore
8	The Lego Group
9	Uniqlo
10	GlaxoSmithKline (GSK)

Source: STATISTA STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

How the survey was done

The survey was conducted in September and October 2023 and polled more than 14,000 employees working for companies and institutions with at least 200 staff here to find Singapore's best employers.

Participants were consulted through an online access panel. The survey could also be accessed through The Straits Times website. An online access panel is a sample group set up by a survey company and available for custom-built surveys. Participants register and agree to take part in online surveys on the platform.

Employees were asked to rate their willingness to recommend their own employers to friends and family. The responses were analysed on a scale from zero to 10, where zero means "I wouldn't recommend my employer under any circumstances" and 10 means "I would definitely recommend my employer".

Employees were also asked over 40 questions on work-related topics: They were asked to give their opinions on a series of statements on aspects such as working conditions, salary, potential for development and company image regarding their current employer.

The rate of agreement and disagreement regarding the statements was measured on a five-point Likert scale. A Likert scale is a rating scale that assesses opinions, attitudes, or behaviours quantitatively.

The survey took an average of five to 10 minutes to complete.



Motorola Solutions employees celebrating International Women's Day. A spokesperson for the multinational technology company says it employs a "people-first culture". PHOTO: MOTOROLA SOLUTIONS SINGAPORE

Developing people at the core of Motorola's culture

Motorola Solutions product manager Vivian Lai, 27, believes that her manager cares about her career progression, which she values in an employer.

"In our weekly dialogues, he provides honest feedback on my performance, and also encourages and supports me to step out of my comfort zone by expanding my responsibilities and leading new projects," said Ms Lai, who has been with the company for five years.

This is just one of the ways that the multinational technology company cares for its employees, earning it a spot on this year's list of the best employers in Singapore, according to the Singapore's Best Employers 2024 survey, a collaboration between The Straits Times and global data firm Statista.

Motorola Solutions provides its employees with learning and career development opportunities based on their individual goals and a flexible work model, said a company spokesperson.

"At Motorola Solutions, we work in a people-first culture, and we're proud to build on our company's strong legacy to innovate what's next so all of our employees can fully pursue their passion and potential," said the spokesperson.

"We strive to create an environment where every employee thrives and is empowered to contribute to our collective success while being their most authentic selves," the spokesperson added.

Outside of her regular job scope, Ms Lai also leads the Singapore employee wellness team for the company, where she helps to run programmes for employees such as mental wellness workshops, music classes, financial literacy programmes, and even life-saving skills courses such as first aid and automated external defibrillator courses.

Pre-sales consultant Kua Yong Kim, 45, said his company's culture empowers him and his colleagues to bring their individual perspectives and ideas, and to solve challenges by collaborating with others in ways that harness their different backgrounds and values.

"Our senior leadership always emphasises that we, the employees of Motorola Solutions, are our company's greatest strength," said Mr Kua, who has been with the company for 13 years.

Motorola Solutions provides its employees with learning and career development opportunities based on their individual goals and a flexible work model, said a company spokesperson.

Rosalind Ang



Among the workplace amenities at Asia Pacific Breweries Singapore are an in-house bar, a full-fledged gym (above) and a yoga studio. PHOTO: ASIA PACIFIC BREWERIES SINGAPORE (PART OF THE HEINEKEN COMPANY)

Beer giant APBS offers nurturing work environment for staff

Ms Tay Hui Zhi enjoys door-to-door transport to and from work, sparing her the hassle of squeezing onto crowded trains during her daily commute.

The senior supply planner's employer is Asia Pacific Breweries Singapore (Heineken Asia Pacific), or APBS, which arranges for the point-to-point company transport that picks employees up from home and gets them back after their work day ends.

This is one of the ways that the beer giant provides a comfortable and nurturing working environment for its employees.

The company ranked third among the top employers in Singapore, according to the Singapore's Best Employers 2024 survey, which is a collaboration between The Straits Times and global data firm Statista.

Some of its unconventional workplace amenities include an in-house bar for employees to enjoy its portfolio of beers for free, a full-fledged gym with a yoga studio and a steam room.

Route to consumer head Terence Li said the company has shaped his growth over the past seven years.

"The leadership team invested time and resources to provide insightful guidance on how to turn challenges into learning opportunities, with different stints in various commercial roles in other Heineken companies in Apac (Asia-Pacific)," he said, adding that he values the company's people-centric culture.

Digital product architect Li Zhannan appreciates the cross-functional learning opportunities across different operating companies in the region provided by the Heineken graduate programme, as well as the company's robust leadership and people development training.

"APBS truly invests in unlocking the full potential of their people – myself included," he said.

Mr Reinoud Ottervanger, managing director at APBS, lauded the employees' commitment towards the company, as he hailed its recognition as one of Singapore's top employers.

"Our people are at the heart and soul of APBS... Especially as we are operating in a challenging and competitive environment, it is critical that we recruit and retain the right people, highly motivated people," he said.

Said Mr Shaun Ee, cluster head of people at The Heineken Company (Singapore and Myanmar): "Keeping our people at the centre of everything we do has enabled us to brew success for the past 93 years, and we believe it will continue to be a critical recipe for our future."

Rosalind Ang

2024年4月5日 星期五

联合早报 LIANHE ZAOBAO

zaobaosg

落实互补专才评估框架后

仅少数企业还依赖单一来源外籍员工

根据互补专才评估框架计分标准，为新员工申请就业准证的企业，若有超过四分之一的雇员与新申请者来自同一个国家，新申请者在“员工多元化程度”项目将不得分。人力部长兼贸工部第二部长陈诗龙医生透露，这类申请到就业准证的外籍员工不到一成，显示只有少部分雇主继续聘用来自同一个国家的外籍雇员。

陈可扬　报道
tanky@sph.com.sg

透过互补专才评估框架成功申请到就业准证的外籍雇员当中，只有不到一成因为聘用他们的企业员工国籍不够多元化，没能在这个多元化评分项目中得分。这意味着，只有少部分雇主继续聘用来自同一个国家的外籍雇员，大多不存在过于依赖某个国家员工的现象。

人力部长兼贸工部第二部长陈诗龙医生，星期三（4月3日）以书面方式答复新加坡前进党非选区议员梁文辉的提问时，透露这一数字。人力部是在2023年9月落实互补专才评估框架（Complementarity Assessment Framework，简称COMPASS），规定有意在本地工作的外籍人士须在数项评估中取得至少40分，才能申请新就业准证。

这些评估项目包括月薪、学历、所属企业员工多元化及支持聘用本地人。

根据COMPASS的计分标准，为新员工申请就业准证的企业，如果有超过四分之一的雇员与新申请者来自同一个国家，新申请者在“员工多元化程度”这个项目下将无法得分。换言之，陈诗龙透露的数字显示，只有少部分雇主继续聘用来自同一个国家的外籍雇员。

人力资源公司仁立国际执行董事梁昌国博士接受《联合早报》采访时分析，过去有些行业因为有太多外籍雇员来自同一国家而引发关切。

落实COMPASS后，由于企业人事部有责任确保员工来源地多元化，过于依赖某个国家员工的情况有所好转。

COMPASS也规定，申请就业准证者拥有大学学位可以获得10分，毕业自顶级学府者更可以获得20分，但有20%的申请者在这个评分项目中交了白卷，意味着他们没有大学学历，或没有呈交相关的学历证明。

陈诗龙指出，一部分申请者可能已在其他评估项目中得分已经足够，就不需要“学历”项目下的分数，选择不呈交学历证明文件。他说：“没有大学学历的成功申请者，占比应是更低的。”

还有大约10%的就业准证申请者因为月薪超过2万2500元、属于企业内调动或只是暂时填补空缺，豁免接受互补专才评估框架的评估。2万2500元是就业准证持有者薪金最高10%的收入门槛，雇主在聘请这些人员时，也不必在公平考量框架下刊登招聘广告。受雇于小企业的就业准证申请者，占成功申请者的三成。

涉国籍歧视投诉 过去三年共446起

这些小企业聘用的白领员工不超过25人，当局规定，这些申请者在员工多元化程度以及支持聘用本地人这两个项目中，各自动获得10分。他们须在薪金和学历这两个项目获得20分，才能达到互补专才评估框架40分的门槛。

陈诗龙同日以书面方式答复工人党盛港集选区议员林志蔚副教授的提问时也说，人力部和劳资政公平与良好雇佣联盟（TAFEP）过去三年总共接到446起涉及国籍歧视的投诉，人力部调查后决定对34家没有考虑职业前程配对网站（MyCareersFuture）上的求职者，就直接聘用外籍人士的企业采取执法行动。

这些行动包括发出警告、强制要求雇主上纠正课程，或者取消聘用外籍雇员的资格。

人力部2014年推出公平考量框架，规定雇主聘用外来白领之前，须先在MyCareersFuture刊登招聘广告，以及公平地考虑本地劳动力的所有人选，才能为新雇员申请工作准证。

Tough job interview questions – and how to handle them

askST Jobs

In this series, manpower reporter Tay Hong Yi offers practical answers to candid questions on navigating workplace challenges and getting ahead in your career. Get more tips by signing up to The Straits Times' HeadSTart newsletter.

Q *How do I handle tough job interview questions?*

A You do not need to perfectly answer all interview questions or even think that you need to be right all the time, says Dr David Leong, managing director of People-Worldwide Consulting.

"Some questions posed by interviewers are designed to elicit reactions and gauge your behaviour under pressure," he notes.

Generally, challenging questions could involve testing how much knowledge candidates have, and how they apply this to unfamiliar situations on the fly, says Ms Jaya Dass, regional managing director of permanent recruitment for Asia-Pacific at recruitment firm Randstad.

Such questions tend to be more prevalent and intense in the finance, digital technology and life science sectors, due to the deep niche skills and high stakes involved, Ms Dass adds.

Likewise, Dr Leong identifies the technology and consulting fields as two employment areas where candidates being interviewed for a job may be asked thorny questions.

"For technology roles, coding interviews can be particularly daunting, assessing not just knowledge, but also logical thinking and efficiency under pressure," Dr Leong says.

Meanwhile, finance and investment banking candidates might face complex case studies or financial modelling tests, evaluating their numerical aptitude, market understanding and decision-making skills under tight timelines.

"Ethical questions and scenarios are common, testing candidates' judgment, empathy and adherence to protocols in high-stakes environments," adds Dr Leong.

Tough questions can revolve around candidates' behaviour, such as being asked about tough situations they have faced in the past and how they responded, Ms Dass notes.

Questions of that kind are not easy to master, and candidates need to be honest, candid and thoughtful with their answers.

These questions are asked in the hopes of understanding how candidates are likely to respond to similar challenges in the future, says Ms Dass.

For instance, she has seen an employer asking candidates who work closely with senior management if they would report lapses by their bosses to the company or stay loyal.

She adds that the exact situation posed, and desired range of answers, would vary depending on the skill sets and character traits employers need for their line of business.

For example, a company in a creative field may look for people with a track record of risk-taking, but not a bank, she notes.

Questions about how candidates would respond to various scenarios in their new role are also challenging, she adds.

Both Dr Leong and Ms Dass emphasise the importance of preparing for likely interview questions, particularly with the wide availability of online resources.

Ms Dass says: "When you look through the job description, you more or less know what they are looking for, and the permutations of possible questions that you can prompt yourself for an answer.

"The more vague your response is, the more research you need to do."

If the vagueness results from a lack of direct experience, candidates have to be prepared to acknowledge it and express their desire to learn more, she adds.

Robust preparation does not just reduce the chances of being caught off guard, but also increases the likelihood of having enough knowledge and context to answer any unexpected questions with poise, Dr Leong notes.

He recommends that candidates who are blindsided should pause and clarify their understanding of the question posed.

"If you do not have a response, you may tell the interviewer that this is a very interesting question you have not considered, but will think about and return to later," he says.

Ms Dass says candidates can also always apologise and walk back on answers, and offer to address it again later.

However, she adds: "The trick is not to overplay the past question in your mind, because if you are too caught up in it, you are not really present in the ongoing conversation."

Dr Leong advises candidates to structure their thoughts instead of blurting out everything they have in mind.

He adds: "Even if the question touches on weaknesses or failures, focus on what you learnt and how you've grown."

Demonstrating self-awareness, a willingness to learn and resilience can mitigate a less-than-ideal response.

Dr Leong says: "It is also beneficial to maintain a positive demeanour and not make facial expressions that show bewilderment or puzzlement.

"When appropriate, gracefully redirect the conversation to other relevant experiences."

Interviewees can demonstrate tenacity and commitment by supplementing their interview responses with brief pointers in a follow-up e-mail thanking the prospective employer for the interview, Ms Dass suggests.

Asking intelligent questions that demonstrate an awareness of the job demands can also act in a candidate's favour, she adds.

Both experts also note that one bad answer does not mean a candidate is out of the running.

"I've yet to come across someone who has had a perfect interview with clients," Ms Dass says.

She advises: "Forge a bond with the person talking to you. Treat an interview as a structured conversation with a stranger."

• Have a question? Send it to askst@sph.com.sg

What hike in deposit insurance to $100,000 means for you

Higher cap will cover 91% of fully insured depositors, in line with international norms

Chor Khieng Yuit
Senior Business Correspondent



All retail banks with a full banking licence and finance companies are members of the Deposit Insurance Scheme. ST FILE PHOTO

ST EXPLAINS

From April 1, the insurance coverage on your Singapore-dollar denominated deposits with retail banks and finance companies will be raised to $100,000, from $75,000 previously, as announced last September.

This means that in the event a bank or finance company fails, your money is protected up to an aggregate limit of $100,000 per depositor.

ST Explains looks into how safe your money really is.

WHAT IS THE DEPOSIT INSURANCE SCHEME?

You would have heard this before from your banker: "Your money with the bank is guaranteed up to $75,000."

From April 1, this limit goes up to $100,000.

This essentially is the Deposit Insurance (DI) Scheme.

All retail banks with a full banking licence and finance companies are members of this scheme.

It protects deposits up to a maximum of $100,000 per depositor in the event a member bank or finance company fails.

The compensation to depositors will come from the DI Fund, which is administered by the Singapore Deposit Insurance Corporation (SDIC).

The fund is built up from premiums that DI Scheme members pay annually and can be invested only in safe and liquid assets, such as securities issued by the Government or by the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS), according to SDIC's website.

SDIC said the premiums are charged to member institutions as a percentage of the amount of insured deposits they hold.

The premium rates are different for each member and depends on the risk they pose to the fund.

According to MAS, annual premiums are between 2.5 basis points (0.025 per cent) and 8 basis points (0.08 per cent) of the insured deposit base.

MAS has said there will be no revision to these rates and DI Scheme members can expect absolute premiums to rise with the increase in their insured deposit base.

It has also said the DI Fund is on track to achieve its target fund size of 30 basis points (0.3 per cent) of total insured deposits by 2028.

WHY DO WE NEED TO RAISE THE DEPOSIT INSURANCE LIMIT TO $100,000?

The amount of Singapore-dollar denominated deposits held with DI Scheme members has grown since the coverage limit was last raised in April 2019 to $75,000.

With this growth in deposits, only 89 per cent of depositors will be fully protected against any failure of a DI Scheme member, a drop of two percentage points.

The increase in the deposit insurance limit will thus restore the percentage of fully insured depositors to 91 per cent, in line with international norms.

WHO AND WHAT ARE COVERED?

Individuals and other non-bank depositors, including sole proprietorships, associations and societies, are covered.

Singapore dollar deposits that are eligible for protection under the DI Scheme include savings and current accounts, fixed deposits and monies placed under the Supplementary Retirement Scheme (SRS).

All these deposits are aggregated and insured up to $100,000 per depositor.

For example, an individual has $150,000 in aggregate (savings, fixed deposit and SRS) with Bank A, which failed.

The individual will get back $100,000 and lose the remaining $50,000 which is not insured.

As for joint accounts, each joint account holder's share of the joint account is combined with other deposits (savings, fixed deposit and SRS) held in his or her own name. The aggregate amount of deposits is insured up to $100,000.

Each joint account holder is assumed to have an equal share in the joint account.

Separately, any monies placed under the Central Provident Fund (CPF) Investment Scheme and the CPF Retirement Sum Scheme are aggregated and insured up to a maximum of $100,000.

Investments under the CPF Investment Scheme are not insured, the deposit insurance applies only to any cash balances sitting in the CPF Investment Account.

For sole proprietors, the deposits in their personal accounts and business accounts are combined and insured up to $100,000.

For instance, a sole proprietor has $50,000 in his savings account and $80,000 in a business account. His combined total is $130,000. He will get back $100,000 and lose $30,000.

WHAT IS NOT COVERED?

The DI Scheme does not cover foreign currency deposits, structured deposits and investment products such as unit trusts and shares.

SDIC said on its website that the main objective of deposit insurance is to protect small depositors.

Many of these small depositors do not have foreign currency or structured deposits, SDIC added.

Moreover, these products have an investment feature and the investor must therefore be prepared to accept higher risks for higher returns.

ARE THE DIGITAL BANKS INCLUDED UNDER THE DEPOSIT INSURANCE SCHEME?

Trust Bank, GXS Bank and MariBank are all DI Scheme members. This means their customers will also be protected under the enhanced DI limit, up to $100,000 come April 1.

Alongside this increase, MariBank will be raising the maximum deposit of its Mari Savings Account to $100,000.

It will also extend the offer to raise the interest rates on its savings account to 2.88 per cent for another three months till June 30.

The Straits Times understands that GXS Bank is not raising the maximum deposit for the GXS Savings Account, which will remain at $75,000 for now.

Trust Bank's deposit limit has already exceeded $100,000. The limit is currently set at $500,000, one of the highest in the market, the digital bank said.

The bank added that customers can earn up to 3 per cent per annum on deposit balances up to $500,000.

This includes a base rate of 1.5 per cent, a balance bonus rate of 0.5 per cent, and a special bonus rate of between 0.5 per cent and 1 per cent.

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Xtrackers II

Australia Government Bond UCITS ETF			
1C	26/03/2024	231.99	AUD
Eurozone Government Bond UCITS ETF			
1C	26/03/2024	232.87	USD
Singapore Government Bond UCITS ETF			
1C	26/03/2024	146.28	SGD
US Treasuries UCITS ETF			
1D	26/03/2024	191.23	USD





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THE STRAITS TIMES

Fresh uni grads draw higher pay, but fewer find jobs: Survey

84.1% had full-time roles in 2023; fewer took up part-time or freelance work

Gabrielle Chan

Fresh university graduates enjoyed higher salaries in 2023 than in the last three years, although fewer of them were able to find full-time, part-time and freelance jobs amid slower economic growth.

The latest graduate employment survey, released on Feb 22, showed that the median gross salaries of fresh graduates rose to $4,313, from $4,200 in 2022.

However, only 84.1 per cent of fresh graduates in the labour force were able to secure full-time permanent roles, compared with 87.5 per cent in 2022.

There were also fewer of them in part-time or temporary work (4 per cent, down from 4.5 per cent in 2022) or doing freelance work (1.5 per cent, down from 1.8 per cent in 2022).

Overall, of the 10,900 graduates in the labour force surveyed, 89.6 per cent found permanent, freelance or part-time jobs within six months of graduating, a drop from 93.8 per cent in 2022.

The figure is about the same for pre-Covid-19 years.

Before the pandemic, from 2017 to 2019, an average of 89.9 per cent of those in the labour force were employed, with 80.4 per cent in full-time permanent roles.

Graduates in the labour force refer to those who are either working, or unemployed but actively looking for a job.

Health sciences, information and digital technologies, and business were the three course clusters that recorded the highest full-time permanent employment rates for graduates in 2023: 95.9 per cent, 88.7 per cent and 88.3 per cent, respectively. These figures represented the percentage of graduates from these sectors who managed to find full-time jobs.

Graduates of information and digital technologies courses continued to take home the highest monthly pay at $5,500, although it is a slight dip from $5,625 in 2022.

Engineering graduates also experienced a drop in median gross monthly salary to $4,500, from $4,600 in 2022.

All other course clusters recorded an increase in the median gross monthly salary for their graduates.

Some 12,300 fresh graduates of full-time programmes in the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore Management University and Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) participated in the 2023 survey, representing a response rate of 74 per cent.

They were surveyed by the four universities on their employment status as at Nov 1, 2023, about six months after the completion of their final examinations.

Due to their different academic calendars, the surveys for the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) and Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD) will be conducted at a later date. The SUTD survey will be conducted in November 2024 and its findings will be reported alongside the graduate employment survey results in 2025, while the SIT survey will be conducted in March 2024 and its results released at a later date.

In 2023, Singapore's economy grew 1.1 per cent, slowing from the 3.8 per cent expansion in 2022, the Ministry of Trade and Industry said on Feb 15. The figure was below the 1.2 per cent official estimate made in January 2024.

The current decrease in employment levels is not notably impactful, as evidenced by the stability of wages, said Dr David Leong, managing director of PeopleWorldwide Consulting.

"This trend suggests that employers are in a position to select top-tier candidates from the job market. It indicates a competitive environment where quality trumps quantity, allowing companies to prioritise hiring the most qualified individuals within their fields," Dr Leong said.

Fresh graduate Eunice Tan, 24, a full-time English language teacher at a Ministry of Education kindergarten, said her job deeply aligns with her passion for children and their development.

Ms Tan, who graduated from SUSS with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, said: "I just decided to follow my passion; everything else was secondary."

While she does worry about her career prospects and finances, she believes she has accumulated sufficient experience and skills through her education to help tackle those challenges.

gabchan@sph.com.sg



	2021	2022	2023
Proportion of graduates who were employed	94.4%	93.8%	89.6%
In full-time permanent employment	84%	87.5%	84.1%
Doing freelance work	1.7%	1.8%	1.5%
In part-time/ temporary employment	8.7%	4.5%	4%
Voluntary	5.7%	3.5%	2.9%
Involuntary	3%	0.8%	1.1%
Proportion of graduates who were unemployed	5.6%	6.2%	10.4%
Unemployed but starting work soon or starting a business venture	2.4%	2.6%	3.6%
Unemployed and still looking for a job	3.2%	3.6%	6.8%
Median gross monthly salary (full-time permanent employment)	$3,800	$4,200	$4,313

Employment status by course cluster	Proportion of graduates who were employed			In full-time permanent employment			Median gross monthly salary (full-time permanent employment)		
	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023
Arts, design and media	92.6%	90.3%	84%	69.3%	72.2%	67.8%	$3,500	$3,500	$3,740
Built environment	94.5%	95.5%	91.6%	88.9%	89.6%	87.2%	$3,600	$3,750	$4,000
Business	97%	95.9%	93.2%	88.7%	91%	88.3%	$3,723	$4,100	$4,150
Engineering	94%	94.5%	86.2%	86.9%	91.7%	82.9%	$3,900	$4,600	$4,500
Health sciences	95.7%	96.7%	97.6%	85.9%	92.9%	95.9%	$3,635	$3,700	$3,910
Humanities and social sciences	91.2%	91.4%	87.7%	75.6%	80.3%	78.3%	$3,550	$3,800	$4,015
Information and digital technologies	97.8%	95%	90.5%	93.7%	93.2%	88.7%	$5,000	$5,625	$5,500
Sciences	91.7%	90.8%	86.9%	75.8%	80.3%	79%	$3,600	$3,900	$4,000
Overall	**94.4%**	**93.8%**	**89.6%**	**84%**	**87.5%**	**84.1%**	**$3,800**	**$4,200**	**$4,313**

Note: Figures may not add up due to rounding off.

Source: 2023 JOINT AUTONOMOUS UNIVERSITIES GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT SURVEY
ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

BTO flats in Tanjong Rhu, Holland Village to go on sale in June

Isabelle Liew

Two Build-To-Order (BTO) projects by the Geylang River in Tanjong Rhu and the first flats in Holland Village in at least a decade are among seven developments that will go on sale in June.

Flats near a future Jurong Region Line MRT station in Teban Gardens and the first development in Chencharu, a new HDB residential area in Yishun, will also be on offer.

The Housing Board on Feb 21 released details on its website of seven projects that will be launched in the second BTO sales exercise of 2024.

It will offer about 6,800 flats in Jurong East, Kallang/Whampoa, Queenstown, Tampines, Woodlands and Yishun.

The two projects in Tanjong Rhu – an area which falls under Kallang/Whampoa – will have about 2,020 units.

Property analysts expect these to be popular as the flats could have views of the Singapore Sports Hub and Marina Reservoir.

There are two-room flexi, three- and four-room flats across the two plots, which are next to each other, with a proposed park in the middle.

The larger 1,400-unit project will have amenities such as an eating house, restaurants, shops, supermarkets, a pre-school and a residents' network centre.

Both developments, located along Kampong Arang Road, are in the vicinity of two MRT stations – Stadium and Mountbatten.

Dunman High School is opposite the projects, and the future Tan-

CONTINUED ON PAGE A2

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2024年2月22日 星期四

香港金融和科技从业员薪资普遍高于本地同行

专家：港府“抢人才”措施推高区域竞争

人力资源公司仁立国际执行董事梁昌国博士接受《联合早报》访问时指出，外籍人士尤其是来自西方国家的专业人士，他们越来越倾向于选择靠近中国大陆的工作地点，因为具战略性的位置有助于他们更好地服务庞大的中国市场。

陈紫筠　报道
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亚洲金融和科技领域的人才竞争愈加激烈，这个领域的从业员在香港赚取的薪金普遍比新加坡同行高，香港投资银行分析师的薪资更是比新加坡同行高出46%。

受访人力资源专家指出，香港在疫后重启经济引擎，港府为此制定一系列“抢人才”措施，大力发展当地金融和科技领域，进而提高区域的人才竞争。不过，新加坡在吸引人才方面也没有松懈，本地银行金融服务尤其重视交易员、投资组合经理、研究和投资分析师，以及具备环境、社会和治理（ESG）相关知识的人才。

根据彭博智库（Bloomberg Intelligence）星期三（2月21日）发布的一份报告，香港的投资银行分析师一年平均赚取9万2149美元（约12万4000新元），高于新加坡同行一年6万3305美元的薪金。至于香港的投资银行副经理，一年可赚12万3000美元，比新加坡同行多出36%。执行董事在香港赚的钱也比新加坡同行高出约13%。

这份报告参考了国际招聘顾问公司米高蒲志（Michael Page）的数据。报告也发现，香港的银行客户关系经理一年可赚接近12万8000美元，比新加坡同行高出13%。

此外，在香港，掌握人工智能开发、数据和应用设计等知识的科技专业人士非常抢手，他们的薪金一般上比新加坡同行高。

能洞悉中国市场复杂性 “中国通”专业人士受青睐

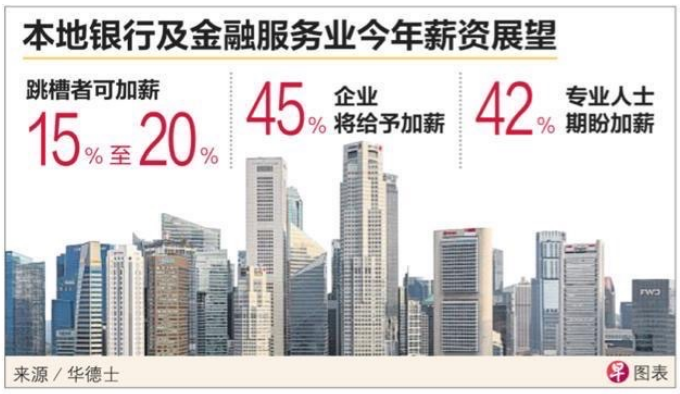
针对香港和新加坡的专业人士存在工资差距，人力资源公司仁立国际执行董事梁昌国博士接受《联合早报》访问时指出，外籍人士尤其是来自西方国家的专业人士，他们越来越倾向于选择靠近中国大陆的工作地点，因为具战略性的位置有助于他们更好地服务庞大的中国市场。这些国际人才一般上要求比新加坡同行更高的薪金。

他说：“这个趋势说明能够洞悉中国市场复杂性的专业人士受到重视，并凸显了靠近中国的市场在招聘人才方面占优势。”

此外，香港去年10月成立“人才服务办公室”，展现港府对吸引高技能科技人才的主动姿态。前年12月底，港府也出台“高端人才通行证计划”，开放外地人才移居香港。

跨国招聘公司华德士新加坡（Robert Walters）科技及转型部高级经理塞西（Sachet Sethi）受访时指出，中国大陆科技领域发展蓬勃，促使香港出现更多与人工智能相关的工作岗位，让掌握这些技术的人才更加吃香。与此同时，总部设于香港的企业也通过更高薪酬来留住人才。

华德士去年9月针对300多个本地专业人士和企业进行的一项调查显示，会计及金融、银行及金融服务、科技及转型等领域的人才今年最抢手。银行及金融服务领域中，交易员、投资组合经理、研究和投资分析师，以及具备环境、社会和治理（ESG）相关知识的人才最受青睐。



调查也发现，本地银行及金融服务业对人才的需求非常高，跳槽者今年的加薪幅度可介于15%至20%，45%企业表示会给予员工加薪。

另一方面，为了协助本地员工应对通货膨胀压力，华侨银行星期二（20日）宣布，将分发总额近900万元的补助金给全球近1万4000名初级员工。在新加坡，4600名初级员工将受惠，每人可获1000元。华侨是继星展集团之后，第二家宣布分发补助金给员工的本地银行，帮助他们应对物价上扬。

星展于2月7日宣布，集团将给予所有初级员工一笔花红，总开支为1500万元。初级员工占集团总员工人数的一半。

位于17区的独

2024年02月19日 星期一 联合早报 LIANHE ZAOBAO 早 zaobaosg

调查：补空缺及扩展业务

近六成受访企业今年有意增聘人手

去年本地裁员人数虽比2022年超过一倍，但人力资源顾问公司Reeracoen集团调查显示，159家受访企业中，有59.1%家企业，表明有意在今年内增聘人手。填补空缺和扩展业务是企业要扩充队伍的主因。

卢慧菁 报道
fcloo@sph.com.sg

尽管我国去年全年裁员人数超越冠病疫情前水平，本地一项调查显示，今年近六成受访企业有意增聘人手，除了填补空缺，扩展业务也是企业要扩充队伍的原因之一。

人力资源顾问公司Reeracoen集团2月15日发布《新加坡企业：招聘意向和未来劳动力规划》调查报告，159家受访企业中，有59.1%或94家企业，表明有意在今年内增聘人手。

这些企业中，79家企业准备请一至三名员工，11家企业想请四至六人，只有四家企业计划增添超过10人。

这项网络调查于去年12月至今年1月进行，涵盖来自30个行业的企业。它们背景多元，包括餐饮服务、建筑、教育、银行与金融服务、住宿、交通、娱乐与休闲等领域。

询及请人原因，57家受访企业（35.8%）说，主要是填补空缺，54家企业（34%）希望增加员工来满足业务扩展需求或探索新业务，另外有22家企业（13.8%）要聘请具有专业技能者。

绝大多数企业选择通过招聘公司来寻找合适员工。过去一年，高达七成多或119家企业，成功通过这类方式请到人手，其中104家公司招进一到五人。其他招聘方式包括：利用职业前程配对网站（MyCareersFuture）及招聘网站JobStreet。

虽然去年本地裁员人数达1万4320人，比2022年的6440人增加超过一倍，但人力部的调查显示，企业招聘情绪有所改善，未来三个月有意招聘的公司比率，从去年第三季的42.8%，上升至第四季的47.7%。有意为雇员加薪的企业比率，也从18.0%增至32.6%。

Reeracoen集团首席执行官内藤兼二告诉《联合早报》，企业希望聘请具备专门技能的人才，新加坡雇主想要在全球市场维持竞争力和创新，打造一支掌握技能和面向未来的劳动团队至关重要。

他说，调查结果也反映我国经济韧性和增长潜能，而正面的招聘情绪，也让求职者有机会加入成长型公司，从而发展专业技能。

根据贸工部预测，我国今年全年经济预计增长1%至3%。我国经济去年全年增长1.1%。

全球经济和局势不稳定 企业仍须采取谨慎态度

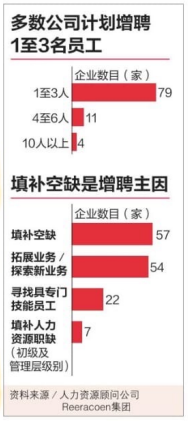
人力资源公司仁立国际执行董事梁昌国受访时指出，通常每年第四季的人力需求会增加，因此企业表明有意招聘不足为奇。

他认为，鉴于当前全球经济和局势不稳定，企业仍采取谨慎的态度。加上近期科技业裁员，是令人担忧的信号，反映出人们对未来充满挑战的集体担忧。

至于雇主要找有专业技能的员工，则说明就业市场不断变化，及掌握特定技能日益重要。梁昌国说，今年劳动市场最受欢迎的技能包括人工智能、机器学习、数据分析和网络安全。

“此外，具备适应能力、可解决问题和善于沟通等软技能，变得越来越有价值。”

梁昌国说，重视专业技能意味着新加坡转向知识型经济。具备特定领域专业知识的人才，可显著提高组织的竞争和创新能力，而吸引和留住掌握关键技能者，将是企业迈向成功的关键因素。



Advice for job candidates who have been through retrenchments

askST Jobs

Manpower reporter Tay Hong Yi offers practical answers to candid questions on navigating workplace challenges and getting ahead in your career. Get more tips by signing up to The Straits Times' HeadSTart newsletter.

Q *I have been retrenched multiple times in my career. Are my job prospects affected?*

A Being retrenched often carries a negative stigma in working society, says Ms Betul Genc, head of Asean at recruitment firm Adecco.

"However, in recent years, it has become such a common occurrence, due to the volatile economic conditions that are happening around the world.

"As such, traditional perceptions are slowly changing, with more employers understanding that retrenchment might not always be associated with the capability of the employee."

Ms Genc says that it is also important for employers to note that companies in some sectors are more prone to retrenchment exercises due to market conditions and sectoral norms.

One example is the technology sector, which, she notes, saw some segments growing exponentially during the Covid-19 pandemic, as companies had to heavily rely on technological tools to keep operations running.

"Many tech companies had to drastically increase their manpower to cope with the demand.

"However, the growth for the tech industry has since slowed down, and it might then be necessary to reduce overall human resource costs to be profitable in the long run."

An employee may be subject to multiple layoffs regardless of competence due to such broader forces, even if their skills are up to scratch.

However, these individuals still should not rest on their laurels.

"For individuals facing multiple retrenchments, especially when these are unrelated to their performance or conduct, it may indeed signal an opportunity to reassess their career path or the competencies they hold," says Dr David Leong, managing director of People-Worldwide Consulting.

He advises these candidates to consider diversifying their skills or transitioning to a sector that is more stable or growing.

The healthcare and renewable energy sectors, for instance, offer such new opportunities, he notes.

"When it comes to explaining past layoffs to prospective employers, transparency is key," Dr Leong adds.

Candidates should be prepared to explain the circumstances of their retrenchments, without fluff, and emphasise that these were due to external factors, he says.

"It's also crucial for them to focus on their skills, achievements, and how they've adapted or grown professionally from these experiences."

Ms Genc also advises people to frame the retrenchment in a positive light, focusing on what they have learnt from the experience and how it has prepared them for new challenges.

"This could be used during interviews, where they can share about how retrenchment taught them resilience or gave them the opportunity to upskill."

Employers, for their part, are increasingly looking at the broader context of a candidate's employment history, Dr Leong said.

"They tend to value resilience, adaptability, and the ability to navigate change, qualities often demonstrated by those who have experienced layoffs."

He adds: "As the job market continues to shift, both employers and employees are learning to navigate the complexities of employment histories marked by intense and abrupt changes."

• Have a question? Send it to askst@sph.com.sg

US driverless truck firms plan to ditch human co-pilots

They say tech has potential to improve road safety, but critics point to financial reasons



A driverless Gatik AI delivery box truck in Arkansas in 2021. The US federal government has left regulation of large driverless trucks mostly up to states, creating a patchwork of rules. After years of testing, Gatik, Aurora Innovation and Kodiak Robotics expect to remove safety drivers from such trucks in 2024. PHOTO: REUTERS

Driverless trucks with no humans on board will soon cruise Texas highways if three start-up firms have their way, despite objections from critics who say financial pressures, not safety, is behind the timetable.

After years of testing, Aurora Innovation, Kodiak Robotics and Gatik AI expect to remove safety drivers from trucks that are being guided by software and an array of sensors including cameras, radar and lidar, which sends pulses of light that bounces off objects. The companies have already hauled cargo for big names such as Walmart, Kroger, FedEx and Tyson Foods.

"At the end of the year, we anticipate getting to the point where we begin operating those trucks without drivers on board," Mr Chris Urmson, co-founder and chief executive officer of Pittsburgh-based Aurora, said in an interview.

All the companies say they are ready to deploy the technology, though they know there is little-to-no margin for error. The risk is worth it, they say, because the technology promises to improve highway safety and lower transportation costs.

Detractors say the companies have incentive to cut losses that investors have been financing during the development and testing phase.

"We are concerned about the lack of regulation, the lack of transparency, the lack of comprehensive data collection," said Ms Cathy Chase, president of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety. Other opponents include the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, a 1.3 million member union that represents drivers and warehouse workers.

And trucks pose severe dangers, opponents say, because they will be travelling at highway speeds and weigh as much as 36,280kg, or more than 15 times as much as General Motors' troubled Cruise driverless robotaxi.

The federal government for now has left regulation of driverless large trucks mostly up to states, creating a patchwork of rules.

California suspended Cruise operations in October after several incidents in San Francisco. California's lack of rules for allowing trucks to be tested on public roads encouraged the three driverless truck firms and others to turn to Texas for testing and deployment.

The difficulties that Cruise's robotaxis faced on the streets of San Francisco – unpredictable pedestrians, sudden road closures and emergency vehicles – are less of a problem for driverless trucks, according to the companies. Trucks largely move cargo on fixed routes and mostly on highways that require much less interaction with passenger vehicles and pedestrians.

Besides saving on trucker pay, the trucks can travel longer than the 11-hour limit for human drivers.

The sensors scan in all directions several times a second to identify objects, speeding up reaction time. There are even estimated savings on emissions of 10 per cent or more because the vehicles will stay just below the speed limit and travel at a steady cadence, the companies say.

And human drivers do not guarantee safe operations.

In 2021, 5,700 large trucks, which weigh 4,536kg or more, were involved in fatal crashes, according to data compiled by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA). A majority involved trucks with a gross weight of 15,000kg or more. These so-called Class 8 trucks are similar in size to those in Kodiak and Aurora fleets.

While driverless trucks have not had any at-fault incidents with other vehicles in testing with safety drivers, the FMCSA report suggests they may not be immune to accidents. Nearly two-thirds of fatal accidents occur when a person, object, animal or other vehicle veers into a truck's lane. Data collected by a self-driving truck's computer system will be key to determining what caused an accident.

"They can't just say we're better than humans," said Mr Brian Ossenbeck, a transportation industry analyst with JPMorgan Chase, of the companies planning to go driverless in 2024. "They have to reach that superhuman level, at least initially, until there's broader acceptance. And who knows how long that would take."

ACCEPTANCE HURDLE

They have to reach that superhuman level, at least initially, until there's broader acceptance. And who knows how long that would take.

MR BRIAN OSSENBECK, a transportation industry analyst with JPMorgan Chase, on the companies planning to go driverless.

At Aurora's terminal just south of Dallas, a worker cleans sensors on top and at the side of a dark blue Peterbilt truck while a safety driver sits in the cab ready for the truck to pull out. If all goes as planned, the safety driver, whose hands now hover above the wheel without touching it while the truck is in transit, will soon no longer be needed for the 320km trek to Houston.

Wall Street will be watching closely to see if Aurora meets its goal of going driverless by the end of 2024, said Mr Jeff Osborne, an analyst with TD Cowen, who has a "market perform" rating on the stock. Otherwise, investors will raise cash-burn concerns, he said.

"If something is slightly delayed, you just end up getting punished," Mr Osborne said.

The start-up raised US$850 million (S$1.13 billion) in the summer, giving it enough cash to operate through the second half of 2025. Aurora then aims to raise a similar amount to carry it through 2027, when it is expected to turn a profit, Mr Urmson said.

Gatik AI, a Mountain View, California-based start-up, has already driven trucks without a driver in Arkansas and Canada. The company uses smaller, box trucks and plans to deliver from distribution centres to stores.

In 2024, the company expects to deploy driverless trucks in the Dallas area "at scale", said Gatik's co-founder and CEO Gautam Narang.

Kodiak plans to "start small in 2024 and gradually ramp it up as we build confidence in the system that we didn't miss anything", said Mr Don Burnette, CEO of the Mountain View, California-based company he founded in 2018.

The first operations without a human aboard will be short runs near the company's truck terminal just south of Dallas and extend from there, said Mr Burnette.

The companies have truck-port partners to help refuel their diesel-powered fleets and roadside assistance in case of a flat tyre.

For now, it is mostly southern states – from Arizona to Florida – that allow self-driving trucks. Kodiak has been hauling cargo with a safety driver from Dallas to Atlanta and from Houston to Oklahoma City. Most companies plan to start in the south because there is less inclement winter weather.

Texas first adopted legislation allowing driverless trucks in 2017.

"Autonomous vehicles are expected to help improve safety, spur economic growth and improve the transportation experience for all Texans," the Texas Department of Transportation said in a statement.

Still, the self-driving start-ups realise that state and federal regulators "have the ability to force a recall and stop the operation of vehicles if they believe they're creating unreasonable risk to the motoring public", Mr Urmson said.

The potential transformation of the trucking industry will depend on whether the initial driverless runs are completed without a hitch.

BLOOMBERG







What to take heed of when giving presents to the boss

askST Jobs

In this series, manpower reporter Tay Hong Yi offers practical answers to candid questions on navigating workplace challenges and getting ahead in your career. Get more tips by signing up to The Straits Times' HeadSTart newsletter.

Q *Is it appropriate to give gifts to my boss?*

A In professional etiquette, a worker needs to consider the occasion, workplace culture and potential implications when deciding whether to gift his boss something, says Dr David Leong, managing director of PeopleWorldwide Consulting.

Generally, gifts are appropriate for special occasions like significant personal events, such as a wedding or the birth of a child, or upon the boss' retirement.

Employees should also note whether there is an established culture of gift exchanges for festive occasions, such as Christmas, at their current workplace.

"These particular occasions create a more neutral setting for gift-giving, effectively separating the gesture from any perception of attempting to curry favour," Dr Leong says.

Ms Betul Genc, head of Asean at recruitment firm Adecco, says of Christmas gifting: "Ultimately, subordinates would wish to show their appreciation to their boss, for their guidance and support in the past year."

Gifting a souvenir upon your return from a recent holiday could be another suitable occasion, according to Ms Jasmine Liew, founder of Breakthrough Catalyst, an organisational development consultancy.

Dr Leong notes that many companies have explicit policies or codes of conduct regarding workplace gifting to avoid conflicts of interest or perceptions of impropriety.

In the absence of such policies, employees should consider factors such as the cost of the gift, industry norms and the company's cultural attitudes towards gifting, he advises.

However, Ms Genc notes that organisations' rules on receiving gifts and benefits usually cover only external parties such as vendors.

She adds: "Should there be no procedure surrounding internal parties, a useful rule of thumb is to ensure that the gift should not be overly extravagant, and must be seen as an appropriate gift in a workplace setting.

"It is also vital to include other team members in the same unit when it comes to gifting."

Dr Leong says items that overstep the workplace relationship, such as personal grooming items or skincare products, or expensive items like jewellery, likely make inappropriate gifts.

Ms Liew suggests that employees add a personal touch by expressing their gratitude or affirmation either verbally, or through an accompanying note.

Dr Leong also advises employees who are alone in their decision to gift their boss something to carefully consider how it might be perceived by their colleagues.

"In scenarios where one team member opts to present a gift while others do not, it risks establishing an unintended standard or fostering an awkward atmosphere among colleagues," he says.

He adds that this situation does not just affect team dynamics but also places the boss in a potentially compromising position should the gift be accepted. "Without a justified reason for the gift, the overall team harmony could be adversely affected, highlighting the importance of considering the broader impact of individual actions within a workplace setting."

Dr Leong also says that if a superior declines a gift, employees should respond gracefully, understanding that the refusal is likely in adherence to company policy or personal principles. "A simple acknowledgment of the boss' decision, without displaying overt disappointment, maintains professionalism," he adds.

Ms Liew suggests that recipients could also share consumable gifts, like food, with the rest of the team, if they do not feel comfortable accepting the gift.

Bosses should strive to decline gifts without embarrassing or disappointing workers, both Ms Liew and Dr Leong say.

Dr Leong adds: "A clear, consistent approach, perhaps mentioning company policy or a personal rule against accepting gifts, can help."

Ms Genc says: "As long as the gift was being given openly with the knowledge of other team members, and it is a modest and appropriate gift, there should not be any conflicting issues arising from this."

• Have a question? Send it to askst@sph.com.sg

As workers return to the office, so does the lowly cubicle



Ms Jolena Podolsky in her cubicle at Simon & Schuster's offices in Manhattan. Once derided as symbols of a commodified workforce, cubicles are making a comeback, and workers are personalising them and posting photos on social media. PHOTOS: NYTIMES

Among office designers and architects, cubicles are rarely mentioned. The once-ubiquitous fixture, so popular in the 1980s and '90s, has become vilified as a sign of the dehumanisation of the workforce. Design experts today say cubicles are a "hard no".

And yet cubicles are back, spurred by demand from employers and employees alike.

"I frankly thought the cube market was dying," said Mr Brian Silverberg, who sells refurbished and used office furniture with his brother, Mark, at their store, the Furniture X-Change in North Brunswick, New Jersey. "We have sold more cubes in the last three years than in the five years before," he said, adding that 2024 would be "bigger than this year".

Covid-19 was an amplifier of a trend that preceded the pandemic. But as employees returned to the office after months of working at home, quiet spaces became more important, said Ms Janet Pogue McLaurin of Gensler. "We had seen a drop in effectiveness because of noise interruptions, disruptions and a general lack of privacy."

Global demand has pushed cubicles and partitions to a US$6.3 billion (S$8.37 billion) market, which is expected to grow over the next five years to US$8.3 billion, according to a 2022 report from Business Research Insights.

Furniture manufacturers had already recognised that workers wanted some privacy despite the tendency of employers to value collaborative areas more highly than individual workspaces.

Anyone who has ever worked in an office with benches "hates the open plan", said Mr Michael Held, vice-president of global design at the furniture-maker Steelcase.

Working from home during the pandemic offered some relief from noisy co-workers, but it also brought new distractions, including constant interruptions by family members and roommates and the nagging temptation to do household chores. Employees cite a lack of focus as the biggest problem with remote work, said Mr Ryan Anderson, vice-president of global research and insights at MillerKnoll, the furniture-maker, which tracks worker trends with the Boston Consulting Group and the messaging platform Slack.

As a result, just as companies are trying to juggle remote work and in-office mandates, they are also deliberating the right mix of collaborative areas, conference rooms and individual spaces.

For example, at Grassi, a New York accounting and auditing firm with 500 employees, the offices have been reconfigured to hybrid spaces, emphasising cubicles or semi-private areas along with open collaborative spaces.

Some of the company's seven offices were "too open with no dedicated private space", said Mr Jeff Agranoff, the company's chief human resources officer. Now the firm has a combination of open and private spaces. The company also eliminated reservation scheduling for desks, an arrangement known as hotelling.

Many employers now offer a variety of workspaces, including shared offices, conference rooms, phone booths and libraries, Ms McLaurin said. And, yes, cubicles.

Just don't expect to see 6-foot-high panels – those remain out of fashion. Instead, the new cubes offer what Mr Held called "sitting privacy" with 54-inch-high panels.

And unlike the cubicles in films like Office Space, which satirised their commodified and sanitised look, the current iterations are ergonomic and flexible and may include lighting. They can be rectangular or rounded, with fixed or adjustable walls, and can accommodate multiple electronic devices.

Teams can adapt them to different needs, and some include sound-masking features. Steelcase, for example, has incorporated panels that absorb some sound waves, creating "less echo in the space", Mr Held said, while also reflecting out less noise.



Mr Lucas Mundt in his cubicle, which he decorated as a cabin in the woods, at Simple Modern in Oklahoma City. Among other things, he appended a picture of a window. There is also a space heater that looks like a wood-burning stove.

MillerKnoll has a workstation that "is not so much a cube and not really a private office", but instead is a "small enclosed environment that is comfortable physically", Mr Anderson said.

Standing desks are often incorporated in both new or refurbished workstations. Some of Grassi's refurbished cubicles include glass walls. Arms can be attached to raise or lower monitors to accommodate different heights.

Demand for refurbished workstations has dropped from its pandemic spike, but it still eclipses pre-pandemic levels. With its increase has come a concomitant drop in office benches, said Mr Trevor Langdon, CEO of Green Standards, a company in Toronto that resells, donates and recycles office furniture. More popular now are smaller set-ups that incorporate cubicles, he said, adding that his inventory "suggests that our clients are holding on to their low-panel workstations."

In a sense, cubicles have come full circle in terms of flexibility. In the 1950s and '60s, private offices surrounded open areas with secretaries clattering on typewriters – think The Apartment or Mad Men.

The increased focus on collaboration in the 1990s and early 2000s led office designers away from cubicles, but there was a secondary impetus for the open-floor plan: cost. In high-rent cities like New York or London, "putting everyone in a cubicle or office was too much, so the open-floor plan became very popular", Mr Held said.

After long stretches of working from home during the pandemic, manufacturers are acknowledging the influence of residential design on office furniture. Some employees are taking this one step further by importing home decor into their workspaces. Cubicle dwellers often post photos on sites like Pinterest and Instagram.

Mr Lucas Mundt, a logistics analyst at Simple Modern in Oklahoma City, had already helped co-workers hang photos, but he wanted to transform his cubicle into a faux wood cabin. After getting permission, he set to work over a weekend, when the office was empty. "I wanted to do it big and over the top," he said.

He added laminate wood floors and covered the walls with a woodlike adhesive paper. He appended a picture of a window and added two stuffed animals meant to replicate those often found in hunting lodges. The chandelier and the space heater – which looks like a wood-burning stove – are voice-activated.

The transformation was a hit. Company CEO Mike Beckham posted photos on social media and gave everyone in the office a US$250 allowance – the sum Mr Mundt estimated he spent – to redecorate their cubicles.

Mr Mundt acknowledged that his renovation was beyond the norm. "If I'm going to spend 40 to 50 hours a week there, I wanted it to feel comfortable and relaxing," he said. "And I feel at home in the mountains." NYTIMES.

Xtrackers II

Australia Government Bond UCITS ETF			
1C	19/12/2023	228.83	AUD
Eurozone Government Bond UCITS ETF			
1C	19/12/2023	236.52	USD
Singapore Government Bond UCITS ETF			
1C	19/12/2023	148.00	SGD
US Treasuries UCITS ETF			
1D	19/12/2023	195.36	USD

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NOTICES

STOCK ANALYSIS

The year's top-performing S-Reit looks to repeat its act in 2024

Today in THE BUSINESS TIMES

A publication of sph

Berita Harian

Are you a foodie?

Explore the story behind many interesting dishes with our journalists.

I tested positive for Covid-19. Should I still board my flight?

Expert advises delaying trip as there is the chance of high fever or vomiting during flight

Sherlyn Sim

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With the school holidays and year-end festive season in full swing, more travellers are heading overseas despite countries in the region experiencing new Covid-19 waves and a rise in respiratory illnesses.

Countries in temperate regions, like China, have seen an increase in cases of respiratory illness among children and adolescents.

Meanwhile, Singapore – which considers the virus endemic – has seen a surge in Covid-19 cases, and so have Malaysia, Taiwan and Australia.

The Straits Times spoke to health and travel experts to find out if a Covid-19 patient should still board a plane, airlines' policies on flying if a passenger is infected with the virus and if travel insurance can cover travellers for Covid-19 expenses.

Q *Should I board the plane if I test positive for Covid-19?*

A Infectious disease specialist Leong Hoe Nam said there are no requirements to report one's Covid-19 status before flying, but travellers with the virus are discouraged from flying.

Dr Leong, who works at Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital, advised travellers with Covid-19 who intend to fly to delay the trip as they could face relentless high fever or vomiting during the flight.

The infected traveller could also risk transmitting the virus to passengers and airline crew, he added.

"It is a social responsibility... Aeroplanes have high-efficiency particulate air (Hepa) filter circulation (which) reduces the spread of Covid-19. But all you need is one cough in front of you at the wrong time," he said.

An earlier ST report said air filtration systems known as Hepa filters can remove about 99.97 per cent of airborne microbes, including viruses and bacteria.

Dr Leong warned travellers without Covid-19 to remain vigilant, adding that a person who tested negative for the virus before the flight can test positive subsequently and transmit the virus.

"This may be because of an early timing of a swab or a poor sample taken at the front of the nostrils instead of one-inch deep... The risk of transmission is highest just at the start or just before the onset of fever," Dr Leong said.

He reminded travellers that a person with Covid-19 can be asymptomatic and that other passengers may not test themselves for the virus before travelling.

Dr Leong reiterated the importance of wearing a mask, adding: "The mask does reduce viral load even if it gets transmitted across. You are likely to end up with a milder illness."

Q *What are some airlines' policies on flying with Covid-19?*

A Major airlines advise passengers who test positive for Covid-19 to defer their travel plans to a later date to ensure the health and safety of their customers and staff.

A Singapore Airlines (SIA) spokesperson said all flight change and cancellation requests for medical reasons will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Customers who booked directly with SIA can reschedule or cancel their flight itineraries through its online assistance request form if they have medical reasons.

At Jetstar Asia, it is recommended that passengers purchase FareCredit, which enables customers to cancel a booking right up until airport check-in opens and get a credit voucher for the value of the flight, its spokesperson said.

According to Jetstar Asia's website, FareCredit is available on selected international flights from Australia, and selected international flights from Singapore. It is tailored based on the trip, with the pricing available during the booking process.

Dr Leong added that normal adult patients with Covid-19 can return to travelling five days after contracting the virus, as there would be a low risk of transmission by then.

Q *What precautions should I take if I still want to travel despite being Covid-19-positive?*

A Mr Aaron Wong, seasoned traveller and founder of travel site MileLion, said travellers should delay travel unless the trip is urgent or unavoidable.

Travellers who test positive ahead of a trip and want to minimise the risk of spreading the infection should wear a mask, observe good personal hygiene and ensure social distancing, he added.

Mr Wong warned that travellers without Covid-19 should also take health precautions during their travels.

"If I have a trip coming up, I'd be sure to get my latest booster, at a bare minimum. If I see someone ill at the airport, I would keep my distance. And if my seatmate is ill, I would ask the airline crew if a seat switch is possible," he said.

Q *Will I face any penalties if I decide to fly with Covid-19?*

A All travellers entering Singapore via air and sea checkpoints, including returning Singapore residents, have to fill up the SG Arrival Card within three days before their arrival.

One question in the card requires travellers to declare if they have fever, cough or other symptoms, and if they visited Africa, the Middle East and selected Latin American countries in the 14 days prior to arriving in Singapore.

According to the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority's website, travellers who make false declarations may be prosecuted under the Infectious Diseases Act.

For committing an offence under the Act, a first-time offender can be jailed for up to six months and fined up to $10,000.

A repeat offender can be jailed for up to a year and fined up to $20,000.

Q *Does travel insurance cover me for Covid-19-related expenses?*

A Ms Annie Chua, head of personal lines at Income Insurance, said Covid-19 insurance benefits are included in the insurer's travel plans for single trips and annual travel to provide customers with protection against the virus and peace of mind.

"Unforeseen circumstances could arise before or during your trip, and knowing that you are financially protected against a variety of travel inconveniences and risks, be it Covid-19, flight or baggage delays or medical emergencies is key to having peace of mind," she added.

If one is diagnosed with Covid-19 by a medical practitioner before the trip, one can make a claim if the trip is postponed or cancelled, she added. Customers have to purchase their policy at least three days before they leave Singapore, to make a claim.

If a traveller catches Covid-19 while overseas, he can claim under the "trip disruption" benefit to cover expenses for an additional economy-class ticket for air, sea or land travel, or the administrative fees to change his ticket. Travel insurance can also cover accommodation – a standard room for one – to continue with the original scheduled trip.

When making a claim, customers must provide documentation from a medical practitioner, the local authorities or an airline to show that they are forced to change their original itinerary because of Covid-19, Ms Chua added.

Q *If I catch Covid-19 while on annual leave, can my employers reinstate my leave?*

A When employees catch Covid-19 during their annual leave, the handling of their leave days varies based on the employer's policies and the Employment Act, said human resources expert David Leong.

Dr Leong, who is the managing director of human resources advisory firm PeopleWorldwide Consulting, said employers may opt to switch the affected leave days to medical leave but are not obligated to do so.

The decision often depends on the organisation's leave policy and the specific circumstances of the illness. Some companies might decline to do so if they prioritise business needs over individual circumstances, he added.

If employers are flexible, employees are generally required to provide proof of their illness – for example, a medical certificate (MC) from a doctor and/or a photo of a positive antigen rapid test.

Q *Can an employee submit an MC issued by an overseas doctor to his employers?*

A Employees can submit to their employers an MC issued by an overseas doctor, but whether it will be accepted is up to an employer's policy, Dr Leong said.

Using a telemedicine consultation to obtain the document from a Singapore doctor could be a practical solution, as some employers may require an MC issued by local doctors for administrative or legal reasons.

"This ensures that the MC aligns with local medical standards and practices, which might be more readily accepted by the employer. Additionally, telemedicine offers convenience, especially if the employee is still overseas or facing travel-related constraints," Dr Leong added.

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Infectious disease specialist Leong Hoe Nam warns travellers without Covid-19 to remain vigilant, as a person who tested negative before a flight can test positive subsequently and transmit the virus. PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: PEXELS

Rocking it like a superstar at fund-raiser



Mr Shawn Goh, who is diagnosed with mild intellectual disability and Down syndrome, rocking the fashion show segment during social service agency APSN's Charity Fashion Gala at Marina Bay Sands on Dec 8.

"I love K-pop bands – BTS and Blackpink," said Mr Goh, a 24-year-old trainee from APSN Centre for Adults. His BTS-inspired outfit, with splashes of black and pink, was designed by Temasek Polytechnic's Year 1 apparel design and merchandising students Mira Nurlyanna Olly, 20, and Ng Lay Woon, 21.

"He likes BTS and K-Pop, and he wants to feel like a superstar on stage, so we created a modernised glam-rock look with elements inspired by BTS. His energy completes the whole look," said Ms Mira.

Anchoring the theme "Look Good, Do Good" was the focus on sustainability, and all outfits were created from old clothing stock provided by APSN's partner Uniqlo and other recycled materials.

The APSN Charity Fashion Gala helps to equip beneficiaries with skills required for the workforce through vocational training and employment support services.

The fund-raising event, which celebrates the diverse talents of beneficiaries through fashion show, performances and artwork, was attended by guest of honour Ms Jane Ittogi, wife of President Tharman Shanmugaratnam.

ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM



Madam Ho Ching (left), chairman of Temasek Trust, is ranked No. 33 on Forbes magazine's 2023 list of 100 most powerful women. Ms Jenny Lee, managing partner of GGV Capital, is ranked 97th.

Ho Ching and Jenny Lee on Forbes list of 100 most powerful women

Vihanya Rakshika
Correspondent

Forbes magazine has named two Singaporeans to its 2023 list of 100 most powerful women, which features familiar and rising leaders in fields such as business, philanthropy, science and politics globally.

Madam Ho Ching, 70, chairman of Temasek Trust – the entity responsible for Temasek Holdings' philanthropic endowments – has been featured on the list every year since its inception in 2004. This year, she is ranked No. 33, two spots up from her previous ranking in 2022.

Madam Ho was the chief executive of Singapore global investment company Temasek Holdings from 2004 to 2021, and helped grow its portfolio to more than US$313 billion (S$419 billion), Forbes said.

It added that she had "opened offices in San Francisco in 2018 and poured over a quarter of Temasek's money into sectors like life sciences, tech and agribusiness".

The other Singaporean on the list, which was announced on Dec 5, is Ms Jenny Lee, managing partner of GGV Capital, a global venture capital firm. She is ranked 97th, down from 78th in 2022.

Ms Lee, 51, "is considered to be a trailblazer in her field, with focus areas including ed-tech, robotics and AI", Forbes said. She was the first woman to make it to Forbes' Midas List's top 10 in 2012.

The Midas List is an annual ranking of the most influential and best-performing venture capital investors.

Dr Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, kept the top spot of the most powerful woman in 2023. Forbes noted that "she is the first woman to serve in the role, which is responsible for legislation affecting more than 450 million Europeans".

In 2023, one peculiar "woman" stood out on the list: Barbie – a fictional character that has been most commonly represented as a doll – made it to the last spot.

Forbes noted that "Barbie has had more than 250 occupations, including astronaut, US presidential candidate, entrepreneur, architect and lawyer".

As a result of her being the focal point of blockbuster film Barbie in 2023 – which grossed US$1.4 billion at the global box office – the character has become a "cultural touchstone", it added.

Forbes said that the No. 100 spot is "allocated every year to a figure that's not the traditional image of power but one who has, nonetheless, come to define a year".

In 2022, the spot was awarded posthumously to Iran's Ms Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old student who became the face of women's rights in the country after her death in the same year that was blamed on morality police, who had detained her for flouting the country's strict hijab rules.

Pop stars Taylor Swift and Beyonce rose through the ranks in 2023, placing No. 5 and No. 36 respectively. They were No. 79 and No. 80 in 2022.

From South-east Asia, Indonesia's Dr Sri Mulyani Indrawati (No. 47) – who is the Minister of Finance – made the list alongside her compatriot, Indonesia's energy company Pertamina's CEO Nicke Widyawati (No. 51).

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Should you refer a friend to your employer?

askST Jobs

In this series, manpower reporter Tay Hong Yi offers practical answers to candid questions on navigating workplace challenges and getting ahead in your career. Get more tips by signing up to The Straits Times' HeadSTart newsletter.

Q *A friend asked me to provide an employee referral for a job opening in my company. Should I agree?*

A Employers often implement referral programmes to tap their employees' networks and benefit from the recommendation of individuals who are already familiar with the company culture, says Dr David Leong, managing director of PeopleWorldwide Consulting.

He says: "These schemes are established with the aim of attracting high-quality candidates who are more likely to fit seamlessly into the organisation."

Mr Goh Duo Geng, director of strategy and operations at talent recruitment and matching platform Glints, says that referral schemes are a valuable tool for modern businesses that expedite the hiring process, reduce recruitment costs as well as enhance team cohesion.

Both experts note that such schemes can be particularly effective in industries where niche skills are required.

"This is because employees in these sectors often have a deep understanding of the qualifications required," Dr Leong says, adding that technology, finance and healthcare are among the industries for which referral programmes are more common.

Mr Goh advises employees to weigh several factors when deciding whether to make a referral, as there can be downsides for employees whose recommendations turn out to be unsuccessful.

Employees should assess whether the candidate possesses the necessary skills and qualifications for the job, consider the candidate's compatibility with the company's culture and values as well as ensure that the candidate is genuinely interested in the role, he says.

Mr Goh says: "Repeated unsuccessful referrals can harm your credibility, and recommending a candidate who underperforms can damage your reputation."

He adds: "To mitigate these risks, it's helpful to disclose any areas of uncertainty or unfamiliarity when making a referral."

Dr Leong says: "Referred candidates who don't meet expectations may strain working relationships and impact the morale of the team."

He adds: "The employee should communicate openly with their supervisor, explaining the referral's performance issues, if any, and offering solutions or additional support to rectify the situation.

"Being proactive in addressing problems can help minimise any negative consequences."

To minimise the risk of making a bad recommendation, Mr Goh suggests employees try to view the potential referral through the lens of the company and the hiring manager. This means focusing objectively on the candidate's abilities and alignment with job requirements, regardless of any personal sentiments.

Mr Goh also says employees should actively seek feedback from the company, hiring managers and the referred candidate after a successful placement.

"This feedback loop helps refine the decision-making process for future referrals."

News analysis

Why are oil prices falling while war rages in the Middle East?



The United States Energy Information Administration has predicted that petrol consumption in the country would decline in 2024 because of reduced commuting as more people work hybrid schedules, more efficient vehicle engines, and growing numbers of electric cars. PHOTO: AFP

Analysts say fighting has not disrupted oil supplies, so traders see no immediate threat

NEW YORK – Intense fighting is under way in a region that holds much of the world's petroleum resources. Yet, after a few days of anxiety following the bloody Oct 7 raids by Hamas militants in Israel, energy markets have been slumping.

Brent crude, the international oil bench mark, is now selling for about US$80 a barrel, cheaper than when the fighting started.

Why are prices not higher? A main reason, analysts say, is that the fighting, no matter how vicious, has produced little disruption to petroleum supplies, leading traders to conclude that there is no immediate threat.

With respect to the Middle East, the markets are "effectively dismissing that anything could go wrong", said Mr Raad Alkadiri, managing director for energy and climate at political risk firm Eurasia Group.

He said traders are unlikely to bid up prices unless they see "actual barrels removed" from the market.

The market also appears to have blocked the war out and has returned to a mood of pessimism about future demand for petroleum, dominated by economic concerns about China, the largest oil importer, and other large consumers. Saudi Arabia and other producers have been trying to support prices by reducing their oil output.

Forecasters are warning that 2024 could be a difficult year for the oil markets. The United States Energy Information Administration predicted last week that petrol consumption in the country would decline in 2024 because of reduced commuting as more people work hybrid schedules, more efficient vehicle engines, and growing numbers of electric cars.

The bearish sentiment drove down prices sharply before the Israel-Hamas conflict, and it appears to be weighing on the market again, despite the risks of a broader war.

Robust oil production in the US has also reassured markets, with supplies from the world's largest producer recently setting a monthly record, at just over 13 million barrels a day.

Mr Jim Burkhard, vice-president and head of research for oil markets, energy and mobility at S&P Global Commodity Insights, said: "Strong oil market fundamentals are prevailing over any fears at the moment."

As the fighting continues, traders have figured out that when it comes to oil, there are haves and have-nots in the Middle East. The Gaza Strip produces no oil and Israel little. For there to be a material disruption in supply, the war's effects would need to spread to the gigantic oil fields of Saudi Arabia, Iraq or Iran.

Early in the conflict, Iran's Foreign Minister called for an oil embargo against Israel, stirring memories of the oil embargo of 50 years ago. But times have changed: Given concerns about the role that fossil fuels play in climate change and oil producing countries' dependence on the fuel for revenues, any such move would risk backfiring on these countries that imposed such a ban. Iran would risk alienating China, the Islamic Republic's key customer.

Eurasia Group said in a recent note: "The risk to supply is very unlikely to come from an independent decision to curtail oil sales by Iran or Opec. Any such move would inflict as much – if not more – damage on producers as on consumers."

A disruption is not inconceivable. Four years ago, a missile attack on a key Saudi facility that American officials blamed Iran for temporarily knocked out about half of the kingdom's oil production.

In an extreme case, Iran, the key backer of Hamas, could try to block the Strait of Hormuz through which huge volumes of oil flow to the rest of the world.

Ms Helima Croft, head of commodities at investment bank RBC Capital Markets, said: "I still think that there is considerable risk that this spreads."

She attributes what could seem like complacency about the impact of the war in part to traders having lost money when prices surged to above US$120 a barrel following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but then quickly fell.

"The market just has no attention span for these kinds of issues any more," she said.

Ms Croft, a former analyst at the US Central Intelligence Agency, noted, however, that the seeming success of the early days of the 2003 invasion of Iraq by US forces eventually led to a conflict that dragged on for years. "We could still be caught by a nasty surprise in the Middle East," she said.

The Biden administration is actively engaged in trying to prevent a widening of the war. Regional oil powers, including Iran, would also prefer to keep tanker traffic moving through the Persian Gulf. Any halts would crimp their own export earnings, while price spikes would risk hurting and alienating their most valued customers.

Mr Richard Bronze, head of geopolitics at market research firm Energy Aspects, said: "It's likely the conflict remains contained and doesn't spill over into the big oil producers in the region or the key shipping lanes. The risks are more from miscalculation and misjudgment." NYTIMES

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Australia Government Bond UCITS ETF			
1C	07/11/2023	219.03	AUD
Eurozone Government Bond UCITS ETF			
1C	07/11/2023	219.61	USD
Singapore Government Bond UCITS ETF			
1C	07/11/2023	144.06	SGD
US Treasuries UCITS ETF			
1D	07/11/2023	187.89	USD



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NOTICES

MIND THE GAP

Good time to lock in high-quality bond yields

Today in THE BUSINESS TIMES

A publication of sph

联合早报
LIANHE ZAOBAO

2023年10月12日 星期四

zaobaosg

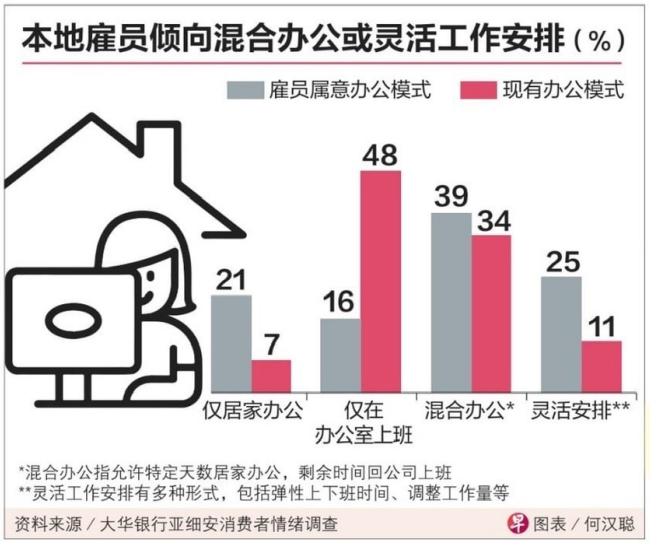
调查：逾八成本地雇员　期待灵活工作安排

卢慧菁　报道
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冠病疫情改变职场工作形态，一项跨国调查显示，超过八成本地雇员希望公司能落实某种形式的灵活工作安排，他们也更看重雇主能否给予心理健康支援。

大华银行发布的“亚细安消费者情绪调查”（ASEAN Consumer Sentiment Study）数据显示，近半本地雇员已全天候返回办公室上班，仅有7%受访者仍可完全居家工作，另外45%的工作模式属于混合办公或公司允许灵活安排。

这项今年6月进行的调查，线上访问3400名来自新加坡、马来西亚、印度尼西亚、泰国和越南的消费者。受访的1000名本地消费者中，836人有工作，高达85%的人希望，公司能落实某种形式的灵活工作安排，包括让他们居家办公（21%）、混合办公（39%）及灵活安排（25%），仅有16%的人愿意全天候回公司上班。



约七成上班族 满意心理健康支援

受访者的年龄介于18岁至65岁，分为Z世代（18岁至24岁）、Y世代（25岁至40岁）、X世代（41岁至56岁）及婴儿潮一代（57岁至65岁）。

约七成的受访本地上班族，满意雇主提供的心理健康支援，但与本区域高达81%的雇员满意程度相比，本地雇主在这方面仍有很大的进步空间。

若以年龄层来看，已在职场多年的X世代，有38%不满雇主给予的心理健康支援；Y世代及月收入介于6000元至1万元的群体，则相对满意雇主提供的支援，比率达74%。

询及希望看到雇主提供什么样的心理健康或相关福利支援，本地雇员倾向于有灵活工作时间（59%）、将未使用的年假折现（37%）、进修假（sabbatical leave，31%）、心理健康日（30%）和灵活工作量选项（29%）。

人力资源公司仁立国际执行董事梁昌国星期三（10月11日）受访时指出，年轻雇员更倾向于居家办公或混合办公模式，那些调整组织政策和在雇佣上保持灵活的企业，有望在激烈的人才争夺战上，脱颖而出。

至于仅有不到一成企业允许员工完全居家办公，梁昌国指雇主的考量，主要围绕在生产力、协作效率和企业文化上。由于缺乏受控的办公环境，一些雇主担忧雇员的生产力和敬业程度可能下降。也有人认为，若雇员没有一起上班，那么团队合作、创新和凝聚力将面临挑战，因此商界领袖对是否要永久实施居家办公，犹豫不决。

> 年轻雇员更倾向于居家办公或混合办公模式，那些调整组织政策和在雇佣上保持灵活的企业，有望在激烈的人才争夺战上，脱颖而出。
> ——人力资源公司仁立国际执行董事梁昌国

“说白了，一些雇主仍希望在办公室看到人，这是可以理解的。”

在全球雇用超过3万1000人、本地雇员逾1万人的大华银行集团人力资源主管唐自强告诉《联合早报》，大华银行全力支持灵活工作制，并自2022年起实施每周两天远程办公。这项措施不影响生产力且成功提高员工的士气和忠诚度。

“更重要的是，员工对这种安排带来的工作与生活平衡表示赞赏，这让他们有时间和空间，处理个人事务和追求。”

Law firm in Twitter takeover to set up S-E Asia hub here

Highly feared US litigation giant also worked on FTX case, now on Credit Suisse bonds wipe-out



Mr John Quinn, founder of Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, is setting up the company's second Asia hub in Singapore, after Hong Kong. Its main focus here will be international arbitration and serving clients with disputes in the US and Britain.

Angela Tan
Senior Correspondent

The US law firm that worked on the FTX crypto firm's bankruptcy case and represented tech tycoon Elon Musk in his Twitter takeover battle is setting up an office here.

Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan is also helping investors who hold Credit Suisse's additional tier 1 (AT1) bonds explore legal action after US$17 billion (S$23.3 billion) worth of debt was wiped out in the takeover by rival Swiss bank UBS earlier this year.

The Los Angeles firm already has an Asian branch in Hong Kong and is expanding in the region to handle the growing cases of international disputes and arbitration.

The headcount for the office here, which will serve jurisdictions such as Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines, as well as India, has yet to be finalised.

Founder John Quinn told The Straits Times from the United States that Singapore and Hong Kong are the two main dispute-resolution centres in Asia, so they are ideal for the company's regional international arbitration practice.

The firm, which will soon apply to the Law Ministry here for its local licence, opened its Hong Kong office a decade ago to represent clients in international arbitration and cross-border disputes.

Quinn Emanuel's main focus here will also be international arbitration and serving clients with disputes in the US and Britain.

"We are experts at identifying and navigating legal risk," said Mr Quinn.

"Often, we get involved when a potential dispute first surfaces and help the client avoid formal proceedings."

Quinn Emanuel has more than 1,000 lawyers practising only in the dispute-resolution field, which includes litigation, arbitration, white-collar crime, intellectual property disputes, government regulatory issues and investigations. It has been engaged by Singapore sovereign wealth fund GIC and investment company Temasek over the years.

Mr John Rhie, the managing partner of Asia and who is based in Hong Kong, will assist the Singapore office, which will be managed by Mr Duncan Watson, a partner specialising in international arbitration.

Mr Rhie said: "Singapore has long been the preferred venue for the resolution of disputes by Indian and South-east Asian companies and wealthy individuals.

"We want to continue to provide the best service to our clients in and out of the region, and we believe that having a presence in Singapore will allow us to do so."

The Singapore International Arbitration Centre notes that a historic high of 332 new cases were filed in the first quarter of 2023, compared with 357 new cases filed for all of 2022.

Around 90 per cent of the new cases filed in 2022 were international in nature, with India, the US and China the top foreign users, and others from Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, South Korea, Britain and Australia.

Increasingly, more disputes involve mergers and acquisitions, and private equity.

Mr Rhie said many deals were sealed during the Covid-19 pandemic, but some of these investments have disappointed or are now distressed, triggering disputes. Many cases involve the gas and infrastructure sectors, especially in countries surrounding Singapore, he added.

Mr Quinn also noted that it was still early days regarding its two lawsuits filed against Swiss financial market regulator Finma over the now-worthless Credit Suisse AT1 bonds.

"We expect a decision within around the next 12 months," he said.

His firm is representing hundreds of bond holders, including around 40 major investment funds and institutional investors, whose cumulative holdings in the Credit Suisse AT1 bonds total around US$6 billion in notional value. About 30 Singapore investors, including individuals and family offices, are also involved in the legal action.

Quinn Emanuel has won 86 per cent out of 2,500 cases tried over the years, earning the firm a place on BTI Consulting Group's annual list of the four most feared litigation firms in the world.

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Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, one of the most feared litigation firms in the world, worked on the FTX crypto firm's bankruptcy case. PHOTO: REUTERS



The Los Angeles-based Quinn Emanuel represented tech tycoon Elon Musk in his Twitter takeover battle. Mr Musk bought the social media platform last October. PHOTO: AFP

askST Jobs

Should I give my personal cellphone number to co-workers?

In this series, manpower reporter Tay Hong Yi offers practical answers to candid questions on navigating workplace challenges and getting ahead in your career. Get more tips by signing up to The Straits Times' HeadSTart newsletter.

Q *Should I provide my personal cellphone number to people I work with?*

A In an era of constant and instant connectivity, the line between work and personal life often gets blurred, says Dr David Leong, managing director of recruitment firm PeopleWorldwide Consulting.

"With the advent of smartphones, it has become easier for employees to remain accessible outside the confines of their offices. The boundary of work is blurred in this respect."

He adds that roles that demand round-the-clock availability like top management, sales, emergency services and healthcare often expect employees to share their personal contact numbers.

"The nature of these roles requires immediate responsiveness to emergencies or time-sensitive matters."

For instance, a doctor might need to be available for patient emergencies, while those in sales may need to respond to clients quickly.

Still, employees should not feel obligated to answer calls or messages after their working hours unless doing so is a known job requirement, he says. "After all, everyone needs downtime to recharge."

If employees do not see a valid reason for sharing their personal numbers, they can politely decline, suggesting alternative modes of contact like office landlines, work cellphones or online chat platforms used in the workplace like Microsoft Teams.

"The key is to assess the nature of one's job: Is 24/7 availability genuinely essential? Employees can ask for clarification on why it is necessary and make an informed decision," advises Dr Leong.

He suggests that employers can strike a balance between genuine business needs and risking excessive, unneeded overtime that encroaches into employees' personal time by providing official cellphones for roles that genuinely require round-the-clock availability.

"This would ensure that the line between personal and professional stays clear. This approach not only respects employees' privacy but also prevents unintentional overtime, helping to maintain a healthier work-life balance."

He notes that the need for constant availability can deter potential employees who value their private time, adding: "To counteract this, organisations can clearly define roles that require after-hours availability."

Employers can also offer compensation, like overtime pay or time off in lieu of the additional hours, as well as build a supportive work culture that respects boundaries, Dr Leong says.

• Have a question? Send it to askst@sph.com.sg

mm2 deal backed by Oei Hong Leong and 'popiah king' Sam Goi

FROM A20

menting its balance sheet and capital base, and paring down borrowings and gearing.

"While the group has yet to return to pre-pandemic numbers, the results have been encouraging," it said.

"The road to full recovery and beyond is within sight. The company's core content creation business grew by 38 per cent to $101.3 million in FY2023, setting a new revenue record and surpassing the previous revenue record for the core business of $99.5 million back in pre-pandemic FY2019."

Meanwhile, mm2's concerts business bounced back significantly after the capacity restrictions for public performance venues were progressively lifted from April 2022.

This business recorded a revenue of $29.2 million and gross profit of $7.6 million, compared with a gross loss of approximately $800,000 in financial year 2022.

The cinema business continued to improve with ongoing cost rationalisation and the development of new revenue models.

"The rights issue will also provide the shareholders with an opportunity to participate in the further equity funding of the company," the statement added.

ven@sph.com.sg

Xtrackers II

Australia Government Bond UCITS ETF			
1C	26/09/2023	231.72	AUD
Eurozone Government Bond UCITS ETF			
1C	26/09/2023	214.59	USD
Singapore Government Bond UCITS ETF			
1C	26/09/2023	141.48	SGD
US Treasuries UCITS ETF			
1D	26/09/2023	186.79	USD

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Today in THE BUSINESS TIMES

A publication of SPH Media

Billion-dollar money laundering case

All 10 charged held S'pore employment or dependant's pass

Employers, work pass applicants who make false declarations will be prosecuted, says ministry



Three of the 10 charged (from far left): Su Wenqiang, Su Jianfeng and Su Baolin.



The Ministry of Manpower said it will take action against the foreign nationals if serious offences are disclosed. ST FILE PHOTO

Tay Hong Yi

All 10 of the foreign nationals charged on Aug 16 over their suspected involvement in offences including forgery, money laundering and resisting arrest held either an Employment Pass (EP) or a Dependant's Pass (DP).

Responding to queries from The Straits Times, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) said it is in contact with the police on investigations into the foreign nationals.

"These individuals held EPs and DPs. We will take the necessary action against them if serious offences are disclosed, in consultation with the police and the Attorney-General's Chambers."

The foreign nationals, aged between 31 and 44, were arrested on Tuesday morning following an islandwide anti-money laundering raid by more than 400 officers that saw about $1 billion in assets seized or frozen.

They are believed to be connected, and no one is a Singaporean or permanent resident.

Of the 10, three are Chinese nationals. As for the remaining seven, three are Cambodian, two are Cypriot, one is Turkish and one is a Vanuatu national.

Another 12 people are assisting with investigations, while eight are wanted by the police.

The ministry said all employers and work pass applicants must declare that all the information contained in their applications is true and correct.

"This includes company details and applicants' personal particulars, as well as work experience, salary and qualifications. MOM will assess all applications and look into any suspicious information."

It added that it will not hesitate to prosecute errant individuals for false declaration offences under the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act.

Those found guilty face a fine of up to $20,000, up to two years' imprisonment, or both, per charge.

"Employers found to have contravened the law will also have their work pass privileges suspended."

Employment and immigration experts ST spoke to said that EP applications by Singapore-registered firms have generally been efficiently processed within 10 business days, with applications that need more time given an update within the timeframe.

Previously, most online applications were processed within three weeks.

Applications by an overseas company without a Singapore-registered company get processed within eight weeks in most cases.

An employer or employment agent submits an EP application on the candidate's behalf.

The candidate, who does not need to be in Singapore when the application is made, will need to provide written consent of the application, according to the MOM website.

The employer or agent then submits an application form, which can be filled up by the candidate.

The form requires details of the candidate's personal particulars, travel documents, work experience and educational qualifications, among others.

New applicants will need to meet a minimum qualifying salary of at least $5,000 per month for all sectors except financial services, which has a minimum of $5,500. All renewals from Sept 1 will be subject to these minimums, which increase progressively with age, too.

Also taking effect from Sept 1 is a points-based Complementarity Assessment framework, under which an EP application is scored based on both a candidate's and his employer's attributes.

In tandem, a requirement will come into force for verification proof of the candidate's educational qualifications to be submitted for any application that wishes to gain points on the basis of these qualifications.

The personal particulars page of the candidate's passport and the company's latest business profile or instant information registered with the Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority will need to be uploaded as supporting documentation.

The application fee is $105. If the pass is approved, the candidate will receive an in-principle approval letter, which is a pre-approved single-entry visa for the candidate to enter Singapore within six months.

Candidates must be in Singapore when the pass is issued, though others may be authorised to collect their physical EP card on their behalf later.

EP holders earning a minimum fixed monthly salary of $6,000, and who are sponsored by an established, Singapore-registered company, may also get DPs for their legally married spouse and unmarried children aged under 21, including legally adopted children.

If an EP application is still pending after 10 business days, it may be because additional documents or information are required for submission to MOM.

Examples of additional documentation MOM may ask for include a company's bank statements, invoices or business contracts, said Ms Jacqueline Low, managing director of JBL Corporate Services, which advises on work pass applications.

Other types of information that she has seen requested include the company's financial statements, a copy of the company's office tenancy agreement, a list of current employees, as well as details of the candidate's job responsibilities, related experience and credentials, and a salary comparison to similar job roles either within the company or in Singapore.

"Employees are often asked to provide evidence supporting their stated credentials and records, while business owners commonly face inquiries about their business investments," said Dr David Leong of PeopleWorldwide Consulting.

Both Dr Leong and Ms Low noted that reasons for unsuccessful applications are not disclosed.

The longest EP approval Ms Low has seen is around 1½ months for a few candidates, before the streamlining of the application system in 2022, while Dr Leong said a three-month wait is not unheard of in rare cases.

"Applications undergo stringent algorithmic evaluations, and delays are uncommon unless inconsistencies arise. Results are typically released within the designated timeframe," said Dr Leong.

He said applicants with questionable backgrounds face heightened scrutiny, especially when undisclosed information emerges during background checks.

"Undeclared records often pertain to offences committed in foreign jurisdictions, false declarations or inappropriate document submissions," Dr Leong added.

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'Golden passport': Plan B for the rich, a rear exit and safe haven for crooks

Raul Dancel
Correspondent

It is called a "golden passport", and it is legal to have one.

Former Google chief executive Eric Schmidt, Snapchat founder Evan Spiegel and libertarian venture capitalist Peter Thiel have one.

But the perks and privileges that go with it – and the ease of getting one – have given many bad actors a convenient way to hide their loot, launder dirty money or skip jail time.

Jho Low, the Malaysian financier who is now one of the world's most wanted fugitives, has several, according to reports.

Low was issued an investment-based citizenship passport from Saint Kitts and Nevis, a tiny Caribbean island nation, in 2011. His citizenship there was revoked in 2018 following full-scale international investigations into the 1Malaysia Development Berhad scandal.

He is believed to hold a Maltese passport as well, and in 2015, obtained a Cypriot passport.

Several of the suspects in a massive money-laundering scam uncovered in Singapore this week hold multiple passports, investigations showed.

Though the nine men and one woman, aged between 31 and 44, arrested on Tuesday are originally from Fujian province in China, they hold multiple passports issued by Vanuatu, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Cyprus, Turkey and Cambodia.

A golden passport is one granted by a country in exchange for a big investment or a donation.

Each year, about 50,000 people get a second citizenship via this route, according to Dr Kristin Surak, an assistant professor at the London School of Economics and author of the book The Golden Passport: Global Mobility For Millionaires.

The number excludes those getting long-term residency instead of citizenship.

Investment Migration Insider, a migration-focused magazine, values the golden passport industry at roughly US$21.4 billion (S$29 billion).

By 2025, it will generate US$100 billion in revenues for nations benefiting from it.

According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), over 100 countries offer some variation of citizenship-for-investment/donation programmes.

Most have robust mechanisms in place to prevent abuse.

Canada, for instance, grants citizenship in exchange for C$1.2 million (S$1.2 million) worth of investment or a C$350,000 donation. But those applying for one will have to wait five years before they can get their passport, during which time they have to be a resident of Canada.

Germany has a lower investment threshold – €350,000 (S$516,000) – but the waiting period for a passport is longer: eight years.

Those seeking an American passport, meanwhile, will have to place no less than US$900,000 (S$1.2 million) in a US company, and must be a US resident for at least five years.

Golden passport

Over 100 nations currently offer citizenship or long-term residency in exchange for an investment or donation. In some nations, it requires a donation of as little as US$100,000 (S$136,000) and a waiting time of just a few months.

Country	Passport delivery	Investment	Donation	Visa-free countries	Length of residency
Antigua and Barbuda	4 months	US$200,000	US$100,000	161	-
Dominica	3 months	US$200,000	US$100,000	153	-
Grenada	3 months	US$220,000	US$150,000	153	-
Saint Kitts and Nevis	4 months	US$400,000	US$250,000	166	-
Saint Lucia	4 months	US$300,000	US$100,000	147	-
Vanuatu	1 month	-	US$130,000	148	-
Malta	14 months	€750,000	€10,000	186	12 months
Turkey	3-6 months	US$400,000	-	125	-
Montenegro	6-12 months	€250,000	€200,000	137	-
Austria	2-3 years	€10 million	€3 million	199	-

Sources: HENLEY & PARTNERS, GOLDENVISAS.COM STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

50,000

Estimated number of people who get a second citizenship each year via the golden passport route, according to Dr Kristin Surak, an assistant professor at the London School of Economics and author of the book The Golden Passport: Global Mobility For Millionaires. A golden passport is one granted by a country in exchange for a big investment or a donation.

CROWD FAVOURITES

But the OECD has flagged at least 14 nations that it says have citizenship and residency schemes that "potentially pose a high-risk to the integrity" of a global treaty that seeks to crack down on tax evasion, as well as money laundering.

Most are Caribbean island states: Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Saint Lucia.

Vanuatu in the South Pacific, the British overseas territories of the Turks and Caico, and the Seychelles in East Africa are also in the list.

There are also larger nations that were flagged: the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Cyprus and Malta.

These countries are on the OECD list because of how quick and easy it is to secure citizenship or long-term residency from them.

It takes only three to four months and a donation of as little as US$100,000 to get a passport in Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, and Saint Lucia.

That has made these nations crowd favourites among those fleeing prosecution or persecution in their native countries, or seeking a safe place to park gains from criminal enterprises that they can access when things head south for them.

A passport issued by Cyprus, a member of the European Union, used to be a coveted one because it grants its holder the right to live and work in all 27 EU states and visa-free access to over 170 countries.

But a damning Al Jazeera report in 2020 forced Cyprus to shutter its investment-for-citizenship programme after it was revealed that, out of over 2,500 people who got a Cypriot passport from 2017 to 2019, dozens faced criminal charges in another country, had a prior conviction or were under international sanctions.

Among them was Low, who is now on the "most wanted" lists of three countries.

Others in this rogues' gallery are Mykola Zlochevsky, a Ukrainian energy tycoon and former minister wanted by Kyiv for corruption; and Russian banking brothers Dmitry and Alexei Ananiev, who are accused in Russia of embezzlement and money laundering, and are also under sanctions from Ukraine.

It is not just Cyprus.

Mehul Choksi, an Indian diamond merchant sought by Interpol, acquired citizenship in Antigua and Barbuda in 2017 shortly before he was charged with bank fraud.

Thailand's former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who was ousted in a 2006 coup and convicted in absentia of graft, now has a passport from Montenegro.

BOTTLING LIGHTNING

Interpol, anti-money laundering regulators and governments have been pressing for tighter reins or an outright ban on the issuance of golden passports.

They have had some success.

Bulgaria has ended its investor citizenship scheme, while Ireland and Portugal have announced that they are scrapping their own popular golden visa programmes.

Canada has revoked visa-free travel for Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Antigua and Barbuda. In July, Britain struck Vanuatu off its visa-free list.

But it is like catching lightning in a bottle.

The small Caribbean nations on the OECD's watchlist, for instance, rely on citizenship-for-investment programmes to prop up their economies.

Saint Kitts and Nevis derives 40 per cent of its gross domestic product from these programmes, Dr Surak of the London School of Economics said in her book.

Cracking down on golden passports may also feel like playing a game of whack-a-mole. Cyprus may be closed for business, for instance, but there are others filling the gap.

Malta, another EU member state, has taken Cyprus' place in the pecking order of best places to get a second citizenship, despite its steeper price of entry: at least €1.2 million.

The European Commission has brought a case against Malta before the EU's Court of Justice, but even if that case moves forward, other nations such as Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary and Austria are just waiting in the wings.

Mr Michael Kosnitzky, a lawyer at Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman who has helped many of his high-net-worth clients obtain second, and even third, citizenships, told the online news site Vox that "Turkey is hot right now".

With an investment requirement of just US$400,000, no minimum stay and a waiting time of three to six months, many of Russia's wealthiest have been scooping up Turkish passports, which grant visa-free travel to 110 destinations.

"There is really little incentive for nations to drop their CBI (citizenship-by-investment) programmes and a very low bar to hurdle for those taking advantage of these programmes," said Ms Teresa Villareal, a lawyer who handles immigration cases in the Philippines.

She said unless powerful blocs like the EU can come up with a wholesale ban, "any hard-charging action will plug one hole only to open up two more holes".

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An attendee at Mr Darrel Phee's wake at Singapore Casket on Thursday. His sister Valerie Phee, a 26-year-old human resources executive, said he "lived life to the fullest", and enjoyed seeking new adventures. The family is still seeking more information on what could have led to his death. ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH

Parents of Mt Kilimanjaro climber mourn loss of son

Mum says he was an independent and soft-spoken person, and had many interests

Esther Loi

Speaking out for the first time since their son died after collapsing on Mount Kilimanjaro, the parents of Mr Darrel Phee are still coming to terms with his death.

Mr Phee, 28, was an independent and soft-spoken man with many interests from boating to cocktail mixing, said his mother Madeline Phui at his wake at the Singapore Casket on Thursday.

The UBS bank executive died on Aug 9 from acute altitude sickness, which set in before the expedition group he was with attempted to reach the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa's tallest mountain.

Madam Phui, 56, said Mr Phee last contacted her on Aug 4 to tell her he was about to scale the mountain in Tanzania and would not have mobile reception.

"Be careful," she replied.

Paying tribute to her son, the housewife said Mr Phee always looked forward to different things. A climbing trip to Switzerland in December was the next item on his bucket list.

He was the oldest of three children. His sister Valerie Phee, a 26-year-old human resources executive, said he "lived life to the fullest", and enjoyed seeking new adventures and had been looking forward to seeing safari animals.

On Aug 9, Mr Phee's father was notified of his son being found unconscious. Mr Jason Phee, 57, and Madam Phui rushed to book flights to Tanzania for the next day.

They received news of their son's death on Aug 10, only moments before they boarded a flight to Qatar, from where they would fly to Tanzania.

The older Mr Phee, an aerospace engineer, said: "Can you imagine what kind of impact it (had on me)? I was hoping he was still alive."

When the couple touched down in Tanzania, they said they could not get the full details about what caused their son's death.

Upon reaching the mortuary, Mr Jason Phee said he "couldn't take it" and wanted to bring his son back as soon as possible because he "did not want him to stay there alone in a foreign land".

But the family had to wait for documents to be processed before Mr Phee's body could be flown home.

The Straits Times reported on Tuesday that the family was seeking answers on the tragedy.

Expedition group Adventures Unlimited has since provided Mr Phee's parents and aunt with more details. But the family is still seeking more information on what could have led to his death.

Before Mr Phee fell unconscious, there was a change to the expedition's itinerary. This resulted in the group trekking to a higher-altitude camp, bypassing one on a lower altitude as per the original itinerary.

Based on Adventures Unlimited's original itinerary seen by ST, climbers were recommended to sleep at similar altitudes for three nights to aid acclimatisation.

The group slept overnight at Shira Camp (3,845m) on Aug 5 and Barranco Camp (3,960m) on Aug 6. But instead of putting up at Karanga Camp (3,963m) as originally planned on Aug 7, they ended up at Barafu Camp (4,640m).

In messages to the family, Adventures Unlimited said the group had lunch and rested at Karanga Camp on Aug 7 before proceeding to Barafu Camp for the night. This decision was made "based on the professional experiences and knowledge of the local operator".

It was not the first time its local operator, which was not named, used this itinerary. The operator was also of the view the itinerary change did not lead to Mr Phee's death, said the group.

On the morning of the summit attempt on Aug 8, Mr Phee's oxygen levels plunged. The guides told him to turn back, Adventures Unlimited said. He was later found unconscious and taken to the Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Centre.

The expedition group said it contacted rescue service Kilimedair, but the helicopter was unable to fly owing to a fog.

It said Mr Phee died from "asphyxia/Hape".

Asphyxia occurs when the body is deprived of oxygen, while Hape – or high-altitude pulmonary edema – happens when excess fluid is produced in the body's lungs.

Adventures Unlimited did not answer ST's queries on Thursday.

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New video teaches pre-schoolers body safety skills

Shermaine Ang

Four children, in the form of brightly coloured cartoon plants, sing and dance in unison. But unlike typical children's songs, they show children what to do if someone gets too close for comfort, or if a touch makes them feel bad.

"If someone gets too close to me, I'll step back and tell them no no no," sings an angry cactus.

Titled The Garden Of Safety, the animated video by Pave – an integrated service for family violence and child protection – was launched by President Halimah Yacob on Thursday at My First Skool pre-school in Fernvale Link.

The two-minute music video for children aged four to nine years old teaches them body safety rules and protective behaviours, such as walking away and saying no when someone makes them feel uncomfortable, as well as telling a trusted adult about their encounter.

Madam Halimah said in a Facebook post on Thursday that Pave adopts a holistic approach for its programme – before, during and after the violence takes place.

"While organisations such as Pave can play their part in preventing domestic violence, we, as individuals, can keep a lookout for our family, friends and neighbours, and offer them a helping hand or advice," she added.

Dr Sudha Nair, Pave's executive director, said the video is part of upstream efforts to protect children against sexual abuse: "Over the years, we've been meeting adult survivors of child abuse, and we realise that the trauma of violence never goes away."

The Ministry of Social and Family Development's Child Protective Service investigated 443 child sex abuse cases in 2021 – an 11-year high.

Dr Nair said the video also gives parents a way to speak with their children about what is often a sensitive subject.

"One of the things that we have to beat is this idea that we cannot talk about sex and sexuality. It has to be the fact that we own our bodies, we have a right to say no. And it's about respect. It's about giving consent," she said.



President Halimah Yacob at the launch of The Garden Of Safety, an animated video teaching children body safety rules and protective behaviours, at My First Skool pre-school in Fernvale Link on Thursday. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

"And if we go with that message with parents and with adults, I guess it lowers the embarrassment in talking about the issue."

She said Pave is currently developing a curriculum to go with the video, which includes interactive elements such as a game children can play, and hopes to work with early childhood educators and schools on this.

The curriculum will include warning signs children can identify when someone gets too close to them, such as clammy hands and butterflies in their stomach.

This is useful even if children are witnesses to violence, such as a parent getting abused, she said.

Pave commissioned animation studio Finding Pictures to create the video. Its director, Ms Lee Jiaying, 32, said her team worked with Pave on writing a catchy song with lyrics children can understand.

Ms Lee, who is 38 weeks pregnant, said: "I was thinking how do I want to leave behind something that is for my child, how to teach him how to protect himself in the future."

Pave is working with the Singapore University of Social Sciences to produce more body safety videos for children and adults in the coming months.

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MP Tin Pei Ling leaves Grab to join fintech company

Christopher Tan
Senior Correspondent

MP Tin Pei Ling has called it quits at ride-hailing giant Grab Singapore – barely half a year after assuming a corporate development role in the company.

In her LinkedIn post on Thursday, Ms Tin said she would be joining a fintech company that "aims to pioneer innovative advancements in the payment industry", starting Oct 1. "I will take on a leadership role in strategic partnerships and business development," she wrote. "I am excited that this new role will give me the opportunity to support the company's product innovation efforts and expansion into key Asia-Pacific markets."

When contacted by The Straits Times on Thursday, Ms Tin declined to say which company she was joining, or whether it was local, regional or international. "Sorry, it's an agreement I have with the (fintech) company," she said, adding that she could not say more than what she has in her LinkedIn post.

Grab issued a statement confirming Ms Tin's departure, in response to queries.

"We confirm that Tin Pei Ling will be leaving Grab to pursue a new role in strategic partnership and business development," the statement said. "We fully support Pei Ling's aspiration to take on a more front-facing role and look forward to her continued championing of tech innovation in Singapore."



MP Tin Pei Ling said the firm she is joining "aims to pioneer innovative advancements in the payment industry".

Ms Tin, who is MP for MacPherson, made waves when she joined Grab in January as its Singapore director of public affairs and policy.

After a public uproar centred on whether the move would lead to a conflict of interest with her MP role, Grab moved her to a corporate development position in February.

Grab said Ms Tin had made "valuable contributions here, supporting key projects and investments".

In her post on Thursday, Ms Tin said she has had "an invaluable experience" at Grab. "It was an opportunity for me to return to the private sector, to broaden my horizons, hone new skills and allow me to make a contribution in a different way."

Dr David Leong, managing director of human resource advisory and search firm People-Worldwide Consulting, said Ms Tin's "abrupt exit raises eyebrows".

"Whether it was a misalignment of expectations or internal organisational challenges that led to her short tenure remains uncertain," he said. "Nonetheless, as an MP, Ms Tin's professional moves continue to be under close public observation."

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Platform launched to help drivers locate EV chargers

Lee Nian Tjoe
Senior Transport Correspondent

A local start-up has launched a platform that will allow electric vehicle (EV) drivers to access more than 1,350 charging points from 11 different operators with a single account sign-up.

Called Voltality, the platform is meant to help customers of companies such as carmakers, car-sharing operators and commercial vehicle leasing firms charge their EVs more easily by removing the need for users to download multiple smartphone applications and put in separate prepayment deposits for each app.

Developed by local tech start-up Beep, Voltality is integrated into the apps offered by these companies and does not require downloading yet another app by the end-users.

The platform, which was officially launched on Thursday, allows EV drivers to search for chargers by type and price.

Depending on the operator's set-up, it can also show whether the chargers are available, although there can be a lag of between a few seconds and a few minutes from the actual situation on the ground.

The 11 charging operators, which include Charge+, ComfortDelGro Engie, SP Group and Go by City Energy, will still have their own smartphone apps and payment arrangements.

Beep chief executive Kristoffer Jacek Soh told The Straits Times while the formal agreements with the charging operators are in place, the company is still in the process of rolling out the full features to its users.

This means that not all users are able to switch seamlessly across the charging points without needing to make separate sign-ups yet.

Mr Soh said the testing is already in the final phase.

The launch follows a trial in June 2022 involving 25 private-hire drivers from Gojek Singapore who were given a card to pay for EV charging at 160 charging points.

Beep said the contactless card is not part of the final version of the platform because it would be difficult to administer efficiently on a larger scale. It also said that it did not want to create another EV charging app on top of those that already exist, and add to the number of interfaces that drivers have to deal with.

On the MyTransport.SG mobile app, which is owned by the Land Transport Authority (LTA), locations of chargers from 15 different charging operators are listed. The app also shows the real-time availability for some of the chargers, but it cannot be used to pay for charging.

There are other operators in Singapore which are not listed on the LTA app. Typically, each operator would have its own smartphone app and payment arrangements.

The Electric Vehicle Charging Act has provisions for the LTA to make using charging services more convenient for EV drivers. This includes giving users the option to use and pay for charging without needing to register for an account.

During its 2022 trial, Beep learnt that EV charging operators use different technologies to manage their services, and revamp their backend systems from time to time.

Mr Soh said this makes it more difficult for operators to work independently with one another to create and maintain a shared platform. "If the arrangement is made among multiple operators, they would need to update the entire set-up when one of them overhauls its own backend system," he added.

Instead of having the operators adhere to a common standard, Beep's approach is to adopt the system that is already in use to make the access and payment for charging services seamless for the end-user.

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When there are 'no secrets' in the workplace, even on personal details

askST Jobs

Manpower reporter Tay Hong Yi offers practical answers to candid questions on navigating workplace challenges and getting ahead in your career. Get more tips by signing up to The Straits Times' HeadSTart newsletter.

Q *I was told my company's organisational culture is one of "no secrets" after I found out other colleagues knew of personal details I shared only with the human resources team. What should I do?*

A You may have had a rude shock when discovering that colleagues somehow knew about personal details you shared only with the human resources (HR) team at your firm.

Employees in this position should begin by documenting all instances when colleagues showed they knew information they were not privy to, said Dr David Leong, managing director of People-Worldwide Consulting.

They should gather e-mails, text messages and anything else that shows the communicated information was shared without consent.

They should then request a meeting with the HR staff member who they believe shared the information, as well as a more senior HR manager, to present their concerns and seek an explanation, Dr Leong added.

If the matter still cannot be settled, the employee should take the matter to an even more senior HR manager or the company's executive team.

A formal complaint, such as through a union or an external body like the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices, might be needed for serious breaches.

If the information is possibly protected by privacy laws like the Personal Data Protection Act, the affected employee could consult a lawyer on his options for recourse, said Dr Leong.

But he noted that HR departments require various types of personal information to perform their duties, including employees' contact information and emergency contacts.

HR may also need an employee's performance and employment history, such as resumes, performance review results or past disciplinary actions, to make decisions about promotions, raises and training opportunities.

Personal data may also be needed to administer an employee's payroll and benefits, such as medical history that the company's insurance provider needs, said Ms Jean Yang, HR business partner for South-east Asia at Robert Walters.

"If employees are not comfortable disclosing this information, they can ask HR on the information required for their employment, so that the appropriate documents can be provided if needed," she said.

Dr Leong said that HR departments may seek medical details from an employee so they can make reasonable accommodation for disabilities, meet public health guidelines, manage sick leave or handle compensation claims.

Still, an employee is typically not required to disclose specific health conditions or treatments, he noted.

Other types of sensitive personal information an employee is not obligated to disclose include those related to personal family matters, sexual orientation, as well as political and religious beliefs, Dr Leong said.

However, he added that exceptions may apply for administering employee benefits, arranging religious accommodation, or if the information relates to job tasks employees perform, he added.

If such details are requested, Dr Leong said employees can tactfully decline by expressing appreciation for the interest but adding that they prefer to keep the matter private, before seeking confirmation that their professional standing and work opportunities would not be affected.

He also advises employees to ask for more context, such as asking: "Could you help me understand how this information relates to my role or job performance? I'm not entirely comfortable sharing this information, and I want to make sure it's necessary before I consider doing so."

However, they said personal details may be shared for investigations into a harassment or discrimination claim, workplace safety in situations involving violence or sexual harassment, legal compliance or when employees might have put themselves or others at risk.

Both experts also said an organisational culture of openness with "no secrets" is no justification for HR staff to disclose sensitive personal details about an employee's personal circumstances.

Dr Leong said: "Information disclosure by HR needs to be dealt with sensitively and discreetly, or the information disclosed may lead to shaming, embarrassment or even office politicking conversations."

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Markets head northwards on hopes of Fed pivot, falling inflation

A lot of dry powder on the sidelines can offer firepower to fuel more upside once bluer skies appear

Market Watch



Ven Sreenivasan
Associate Editor & Senior Columnist



In the coming weeks, all eyes will be on the US second-quarter reporting season, which kicked off last Friday. The Federal Open Market Committee meeting on July 26, and the message that will come from it, will also be watched. PHOTO: AFP

Markets rallied last week amid signs that cooling inflation might help the United States economy avert a deep recession. There is also optimism – or hope – that the upcoming results season could surprise on the upside.

The Dow Jones put on its best weekly performance since March as it gained 2.3 per cent last week to 34,509.03, bringing its year-to-date gain to almost 4 per cent.

The broader S&P 500 closed 2.4 per cent higher at 4,505.42 points for the week, while the Nasdaq was up 3.3 per cent to 14,113.7 points.

Singapore's Straits Times Index (STI) rallied 3.5 per cent last week to 3,248.63, more than recovering from the preceding week's 2.1 per cent decline. As the recovery firmed, more traders participated, with Thursday seeing close to $1.5 billion worth of stocks changing hands.

The three local banks averaged a 2.8 per cent gain on the week, while Singtel rallied 4 per cent, which includes a 1.2 per cent gain on Friday following the release of Singapore's advance gross domestic product estimates. Tech heavyweights Venture, AEM and UMS also averaged a 3.8 per cent gain on the week.

News of the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau's investigation of tycoon Ong Beng Seng sent his Hotel Properties Limited shares tumbling some 4 per cent initially, with the stock recovering to close at a net 2.6 per cent loss at $3.76 on Friday.

Seatrium was the STI's flier for the week, gaining 16 per cent to 14.5 cents. On July 12, the company announced it had secured a green trade finance facility from OCBC Bank worth an estimated $1.04 billion.

Shares of Thomson Medical Group saw active trading on news that the Singapore-listed healthcare provider is buying into Vietnam's largest private hospital group, Far East Medical Vietnam Limited, for some US$360 million (S$476 million). The acquisition would more than double the size of the healthcare group, be immediately earnings accretive and provide huge strategic synergies. The stock hit a high at 6.4 cents, before closing at 6.1 cents for the week.

So what's next for the market?

Although the S&P 500 index has rallied almost 15 per cent in 2023, most of the upside has been due to technology stocks. In fact, tech stocks within the broad-based index have rallied more than 36 per cent this year. The top five tech stocks by market capital – Apple, Microsoft, Alphabet, Amazon and Nvidia – are collectively up a whopping 70 per cent.

All eyes are now on the July 26 Federal Open Market Committee meeting, and the message that will come from it.

Although the United States consumer price index has fallen for the third consecutive month to hit 3 per cent for June – one-third the level of a year ago – some Fed governors are not convinced that it is time to pull back from the tight monetary stance.

Federal Reserve governor Christopher Waller last week insisted that the US central bank should go ahead with two more 25-basis-point rate hikes this year.

"I see two more 25-basis-point hikes in the target range over the four remaining meetings this year as necessary to keep inflation moving towards our target," Mr Waller said in a speech to bond market experts at New York University.

If Mr Waller gets his way, the key Fed funds rate would hit the 5.5 per cent to 5.75 per cent range, its highest in four decades. However, Fed funds barometer CME FedWatch's expectations for the rate ending the year above an upper band of 5.5 per cent has halved.

Meanwhile, the US dollar index declined significantly over the Asia week, forming its lowest levels for the year to date and returning to levels last seen in April 2022. The move in the US dollar coincided with two-year US Treasury yields declining from 4.93 per cent at the Friday close in New York to near 4.6 per cent at the Asia close.

Given the mixed messages, investors have been understandably cautious on the investment outlook. This is not necessarily a bad thing for markets because it represents a healthy level of scepticism and indicates a lot of dry powder on the sidelines. This can offer firepower to fuel more upside for markets going forward once bluer skies appear.

In the coming weeks, all eyes will be on the US second-quarter reporting season, which kicked off last Friday. If the results season surprises on the upside, markets could head higher. After all, as some market insiders like to point out, there is well over US$3 trillion of money market funds still not invested.

According to data compiled by FactSet on July 7, 113 of the S&P 500 companies have issued earnings guidance for the second quarter so far. Of these, 46 have issued positive guidance that is well above the numbers for the past few quarters. In fact, the second quarter has seen the highest number of S&P 500 companies issuing positive guidance for a quarter since the third quarter of 2021.

Another potential silver lining for the markets – especially in the Asia-Pacific – is the possibility of more stimulus from China following the Politburo meeting later in July, which traditionally sets the tone for economic policy for the second half of the year.

China's economic recovery has been losing steam in recent months amid renewed weakness in the property market, the deep indebtedness of local governments, record high youth unemployment, sluggish household and business confidence, and fraught geopolitical tensions.

China will release a slew of economic data this week, including its second-quarter economic growth rate along with key data for June on retail sales, industrial production, fixed-asset investments and property investments. If the data comes in better than expected, it should be good news for undervalued Chinese equities and global markets.

A number of key US economic data reports are also scheduled for release. Positive numbers may inject optimism about the US economy and push back on recession fears.

US retail sales and industrial output figures, due on Tuesday, are expected to show improvements that augur well for the US economy. This could be supported by initial and subsequent US jobless claims figures that are also on tap this week. Consensus forecasts also expect the Philadelphia Fed index and the index of leading indicators for the US, due by Thursday, to show that the situation has become less negative in comparison to the preceding months.

"Overall, while there are reasons to be careful in the short term given continued headwinds, investors should not lose sight of the medium to longer term, which remains relatively sanguine," said Mr Vasu Menon, managing director for investment strategy at OCBC. "Our fundamental views on wealth management remain unchanged. For prudence, investors should always have a balance of assets in their portfolios, including exposure to equities, bonds and even commodities."

While another 25-basis-point rate hike appears a certainty this month, the Fed is approaching a pivot point.

Past interest rate cuts by the Fed have generally resulted in strong market rallies. If the US central bank pivots next year, and if there is no hard landing in the US and other major global economies, this could offer greater conviction for the sizeable amount of idle funds sitting on the sidelines to get back into markets.

So, stay invested.

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NOTICES

Worked here for years? Here is a Rolex

Some companies are giving out generous long service awards, but these may not be enough to keep staff, say experts



Benson Ang
Lifestyle Correspondent

Is this the end of the road for the long service award?

Some organisations are doling out generous long service awards, from gold bars to Rolex watches to extra vacation days to employees, especially in high-turnover industries.

But human resource experts say the long service award may be on its last legs in today's high-flux job market.

Only a handful of the 25 companies approached by The Sunday Times replied to say they had enhanced their long service award benefits in recent years.

While the award still holds value in fostering loyalty and retention, the modern workforce prioritises career growth and work-life balance, so the prospect of getting an extra few thousand dollars or a brand-name watch is unlikely to sway their loyalty, experts say.

Paradise Group Holdings made headlines when photos of its March 6 dinner-and-dance event went viral on social media. The company gave out more than 330 long service awards to employees at its 14th anniversary dinner at Marina Bay Sands.

Of the recipients, 98 were each given a Rolex watch – valued between $10,000 and $11,000 a piece – for working 10 years in the organisation.

Those with tenures of five or eight years received Suisse gold bars, and workers who served 15 years each received $5,000 worth of travel vouchers.

The event cost the organisation $2 million and was attended by more than 1,300 of its local and overseas staff and partners.

Since 2019, OCBC Bank has been giving additional vacation days, on a one-off basis, to long-serving employees.

This is on top of an award quantum available in cash or a gold medallion of equal value, for those with 10 or more years of service.

These start at $250 for five years of service, and go up to $2,000 and 10 additional vacation days for 40 years of service.

Staff who continue working after 40 years will get $2,000 and 10 additional vacation days for every subsequent five years of service, until the statutory retirement age.

Mr Ernest Phang, managing director at OCBC's group human resources division, says that the additional vacation days – which can be used for any purpose, from relaxing to travelling to spending time with families – recognise that employees increasingly prioritise well-being and work-life integration.

He adds: "The needs, priorities and mindsets of employees have changed and will continue to change."

For 30 years of service, Ms Magdalene Leong, a vice-president at the bank's global consumer financial services division, received $2,000 cash, as well as five additional vacation days in 2022.

The Singaporean spent the extra time off travelling with her husband Tan Beng Seng, a director of a food catering company, to Berlin and Frankfurt in May 2022. They are in their 50s and have no children.

Their nine-day trip included highlights such as visiting the Museum of Natural History, which houses a taxidermied Bobby the gorilla, who lived in the Berlin Zoo until his death in 1935. They also had dinner at the Kafer rooftop restaurant at the Reichstag Building, the current home of the German Parliament.

She says: "It was a lovely trip to celebrate our 29 years of marriage and make beautiful memories together. The award made me feel valued as an important member of the team, and I am grateful that OCBC recognises and celebrates its loyal and committed staff."

As with all organisations, people at the bank come and go. But she has observed that many former employees also get rehired.

She says: "The fact that they come back is testament to the great working environment and culture at OCBC, and shows even if they have left the organisation, the door is always open for them to return."

Earlier this year, the Pan Pacific Singapore hotel revised its long service reward scheme, reducing its shortest long service award tenure to a mere three years, down from five years previously.

The change, says Ms Sharon Lee, director of human capital and development at Pan Pacific Singapore, is to emphasise the importance of recognising associates who stay on in its high-attrition service industry from the third year onwards.

Staff who serve three years now get a $300 cash award, and these amounts go up to $3,500 for those who have served 35 years.

Ms Janice Chan, a food and beverage team leader who has been with the hotel for 36 years, received the highest amount in 2022, on top of a trophy and certificate.

The Singaporean, who is responsible for the preparation and service of breakfast at the hotel's all-day dining restaurant Edge, says: "I feel honoured to be recognised for my service, and have never considered moving to another organisation. Many of my colleagues are not only my good friends, but they also feel like family."

YOUNGER STAFF MAY STILL LEAVE DESPITE REWARDS

Despite the generosity of long service awards, experts are sceptical about whether they will convince employees, especially younger ones, to stay.

"For such workers, their skills may not be easily transferable to other organisations and they might not be able to find better positions outside their organisations. For them, it would make more sense to stay, and the long service award is just a bonus."

But for younger workers, particularly in high-growth industries such as fintech and crypto, they are not likely to be swayed, as their priority is to learn and earn as much as they can as quickly as possible, Mr Heng notes.

"Compared with previous generations, millennials and Gen Zers do not prize company loyalty as much, as they grew up in a world of technological advances surrounded by smartphones and high-speed Wi-Fi, and expect everything to happen 'now'.

"They do not care about long service awards. Why wait when they can get several golden handshakes, worth much more, simply by job-hopping?" he adds.

Dr David Leong, managing director of human resource advisory firm People Worldwide Consulting, agrees that long service awards can hold selective value in some industries by symbolising appreciation and reinforcing loyalty.

But he adds that relying solely on such awards may not be sufficient to retain talent, as the modern workforce prioritises career growth, work-life balance and purpose-driven work.

Effective long-term worker reward systems today, he observes, include tailored development programmes, mentorship, job rotation and recognition beyond tenure-based awards.

Such systems engage and challenge employees, allowing them to grow and contribute meaningfully, thus fostering loyalty and retention.

"Employers need holistic approaches to retain workers, such as by offering comprehensive benefits and training, as well as allowing flexible work arrangements and sabbatical leave. They also need to have a positive work culture and clear career paths laid out."

Others acknowledge that long service awards do not stave off resignation letters.

Rather, what is important, says Pan Pacific Singapore's Ms Lee, is building a great workplace. "Many of our team members continue to work in the hotel because they have built strong friendships with their colleagues as well as guests," she says.

"To retain staff, we also need to demonstrate that there are career opportunities and progressions for them, as well as chances to hone additional skills that will be important for their career."

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Madam Tan Ai Tee's Rolex watch is valued at about $10,000. As it is a ladies' watch, she intends to eventually leave it to her daughter. ST PHOTO: BRIAN TEO



PHOTO: MAGDALENE LEONG

It was a lovely trip to celebrate our 29 years of marriage... The award made me feel valued as an important member of the team.

MS MAGDALENE LEONG (above), who received five additional vacation days for 30 years of service at OCBC Bank. She used the extra time to travel with her husband to Germany in 2022

$10,000 watch as a reward

Cleaner Tan Ai Tee has never owned a watch in her life. But thanks to a decade of service at Paradise Group Holdings, the Singaporean now owns a gleaming silver Rolex.

She received the timepiece, valued at about $10,000, on March 6 at the restaurant group's dinner-and-dance event at the Sands Grand Ballroom at Marina Bay Sands.

The 67-year-old says in Mandarin: "I felt very happy and touched that the bosses and company recognised me for my work here. I did not expect that as a part-timer, I can get a Rolex watch."

Madam Tan, who left school after Primary 6, began working at 16. She assembled computer parts in a factory, worked as a department store assistant and sold chicken rice in a coffee shop, among other jobs.

In 2013, she joined Paradise Group as kitchen staff in its Seafood Paradise restaurant at Defu Lane 10, where she sorted orders and served customers.

When the restaurant moved out at the end of 2016, she became a cleaner at the group's headquarters in the same street. Since then, she has been wiping down glass doors, emptying wastepaper baskets and cleaning the common spaces, such as the toilets, five days a week from 8am to 2pm.

"I never thought of moving as I cannot bear to leave my 'family' here. I feel a sense of belonging and enjoy the atmosphere. My colleagues are friendly and kind. They greet me when I empty their bins and share food with me, such as cake, snacks or breakfast from McDonald's.

"During Chinese New Year, they always give me hongbao, which I am appreciative of."

Her husband, 76, is retired. They have three children aged 46, 44 and 43, and three grandchildren aged 20, 17 and 16. The couple live with one of their sons in a two-room rental flat.

As the watch is a ladies' model, Madam Tan plans to eventually leave it to her daughter. She stores it with the 2.5g Suisse gold bar she received from the company in 2018, in her fifth year of service, and a 5g gold bar she got after serving eight years in 2021.

"As long as I am healthy enough to keep working, why not? I like waking up early and staying active. I also feel very appreciated by the bosses here, so I intend to keep going as long as I can," she says.

How some companies reward long-serving staff

Years of service	3	5	7	8	10	15	20	25	30	35	40
Paradise Group Holdings	–	2.5g Suisse gold bar	–	5g Suisse gold bar	Rolex watch	Travel vouchers worth $5,000	–	–	–	–	–
OCBC Bank	–	$250	–	–	$500	$750	$1,000, three days vacation leave	$1,500, five days vacation leave	$2,000, five days vacation leave	$2,000, five days vacation leave	$2,000, 10 days vacation leave
Pan Pacific Singapore	$300	$500	$700	_	$1,000	$1,500	$2,000	$2,500	$3,000	$3,500	–

SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

Offer support to new joiners making a career switch

askST Jobs

Manpower reporter Tay Hong Yi offers practical answers to candid questions on navigating workplace challenges and getting ahead in your career. Get more tips by signing up to The Straits Times' HeadSTart newsletter.

Q *A new colleague has just joined my team after a career switch. How can I support the newcomer?*

A The first step in helping a new colleague who has just switched to your line of work is to foster a welcoming and inclusive work environment, said Dr David Leong, managing director of human resources consultancy PeopleWorldwide Consulting.

"Encourage team members to extend a friendly hand and be open to answering questions."

The new colleague should then be paired with a seasoned mentor who is available to address concerns and offer guidance.

"Regular check-ins and constructive feedback from the mentor can fast-track the newcomer's understanding of organisational dynamics and performance expectations," added Dr Leong.

Even if the new joiner has attended upskilling courses or career conversion programmes to pick up new knowledge and relevant skills, the person still requires ongoing guidance and support to navigate the transition effectively, underscoring the need for a mentor.

Dr Leong noted that such new joiners need ongoing guidance on identifying further learning opportunities, professional development paths, and acquiring new certifications to continue to stay relevant and progress in their new industry.

These career switchers may still lack in-depth industry-specific knowledge such as industry trends, best practices and emerging technologies, he said.

Moreover, career switchers often enter a new industry without an established professional network.

"They may require guidance in building connections, attending industry events and leveraging online platforms for networking purposes," Dr Leong added.

"Transitioning into a new industry can be emotionally challenging for mid-career switchers. They may face self-doubt, imposter syndrome or frustration during the adjustment period."

Support groups, mentors and employee assistance programmes are crucial to provide this guidance, he said.

Dr Leong also advised employees to treat those embarking on a new career differently from fresh graduates starting their first job, due to the former's accumulated professional experience and soft skills, which may be transferable.

"While fresh graduates typically require comprehensive training to develop foundational skills, career switchers may have a different learning curve.

"Customising onboarding and training programmes to address their knowledge gaps and industry-specific requirements can be beneficial."

Skills aside, colleagues should avoid making dismissive comments belittling or downplaying the career switcher's previous experience or accomplishments.

"Dismissing their prior career as irrelevant or unimportant can be demoralising and undermine their confidence," Dr Leong noted, adding that colleagues should also refrain from making assumptions or generalisations based on the career switcher's age.

"Treat career switchers based on their skills, knowledge and potential, rather than preconceived notions about their age."

It is also essential to refrain from underestimating or doubting the abilities of career switchers due to their lack of experience in the new industry, Dr Leong said.

He added: "Career switchers may require additional time and support to adapt to their new roles and industry. Demonstrating patience, understanding and empathy during their learning process is crucial. Avoid pressuring them or expecting immediate mastery of new skills or knowledge."

• Have a question? Send it to askst@sph.com.sg

Non-compete clauses in job contracts: Are they enforceable?



Some companies include non-compete clauses in employment contracts as a form of deterrence against staff joining a competitor, even if such clauses may be unenforceable, say legal and employment experts. PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO

Employers must be able to show they have legitimate business interests to protect

Tay Hong Yi

After graduating from a private university in 2018, Mr Zong Xian took on his first job as a manager in a tuition centre, managing finance and human resource functions.

After four years, he decided to move on but was subject to a non-compete clause in his employment contract that forbade him from joining a competitor in the same industry.

"As a first-time job seeker who got a job offer... I didn't know if (my employers) did enforce it, or how hard it is for them to enforce," said the 30-year-old, who declined to give his surname.

He is now a civil servant after a short stint in a blockchain technology start-up.

There are signs that some employers – unwittingly or not – still include clauses in employment contracts as a form of deterrence against employees, like Mr Zong Xian, joining a competitor, even if they may be unenforceable, according to legal and employment experts.

Employment lawyer Clarence Ding said that non-compete clauses can be found in numerous industries, citing past cases involving employers in retail, healthcare, education and financial services which have come before Singapore's courts.

Said Mr Ding, a partner at Simmons & Simmons: "The common denominator in almost all of those examples is the unique and central position the employee plays in the business.

"This can be because the employee was instrumental in helping the company develop and maintain several key client relationships, is highly influential within the organisation, or has access to sensitive or proprietary information which is of a very confidential nature."

However, just because employer and employee agree on a non-compete clause does not make it enforceable.

Instead, employers must be able to show they have a legitimate interest to protect that would not be protected through other contractual terms, such as restrictions on the use of confidential or other proprietary information, noted the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC).

The duration, geographical area and scope of a non-compete clause should also be limited, taking into account the facts of each case, NTUC added.

"Employers should generally not have non-compete clauses in employment contracts for workers who are not in higher-paying jobs or for rank-and-file workers," it said.

These workers are unlikely to have access to trade secrets or highly confidential information that would harm their current employer's business interest, and a non-compete clause would also likely have a greater impact on their livelihoods, it said.

Nonetheless, there are companies that use the non-compete clause as part of a standardised employment contract across all roles, said Ms Irene Tay, a certified Institute for Human Resource Professionals senior professional.

Instead, human resource staff should work with company management and lawyers to identify specific roles that a non-compete clause has to apply to, stating clear reasons, she said.

Mr Ding said that it is "unfortunately fairly widespread" for employers to include a non-compete clause just to dissuade employees from joining a competitor, even though they might not be able to show a legitimate interest to protect, and their interest is already sufficiently protected by other contractual terms.

NTUC said 20 union members sought advice and assistance from the Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management on the non-compete clauses in their employment contracts in 2022.

"Most of them asked about the reasonableness of the clauses and how they could approach their employers to waive the clauses."

Out of the 20 cases, two of them were referred to the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (Tafep) and another two were referred to NTUC's legal clinic for advice from volunteer lawyers.

"When engaged by the Ministry of Manpower and Tafep, employers have generally been cooperative in removing or not enforcing unreasonable non-compete clauses," said the labour movement.

"However, for non-unionised companies, the employment terms are left to the contracting parties to negotiate and agree on," NTUC said.

Mr Ding said non-compete clauses tend to be more prevalent where employees operate in markets with a few firms, each with substantial influence and market share.

Other common attributes of sectors where non-compete clauses are prevalent include a high level of innovation, as well as those where key players are sworn rivals, or which have a reputation for poaching one another's key employees, he said.

Typically, clauses last for six months to a year, and even longer in rare instances, said Mr Paul Ng, chief executive of recruitment firm TG Group.

A spokesman for education group EtonHouse said it does not include a non-compete clause in employment contracts for childcare staff and educators as the industry is small and the skill set is niche.

"We respect our staff's decision should they decide to move on and seek other opportunities within the same industry."

However, employees are subject to a non-solicitation clause, which prohibits them from approaching other staff or customers for business within six months of leaving.

This limits unfair practices within the industry and ensures a stable workforce that minimises disruptions to students, EtonHouse said.

Meanwhile, childcare provider Babilou has taken another approach.

The company said it expects all employees in Singapore, both in its childcare centres and headquarters, to adhere to a non-compete clause which is stated in its employee handbook instead of the employment contracts.

Explaining its rationale for the clause, the company said: "We regard all our employees, especially educators, as professionals, like doctors or lawyers, where their certified expertise and skill set are their key livelihood."

It added that it has not received any feedback from staff on the clause.

In Mr Zong Xian's case, the non-compete clause ultimately did not hinder his career move.

"I told my ex-boss where I was considering going to, and the non-compete clause was not even mentioned," he said, adding that he had a good relationship with his boss and was looking at work opportunities in other sectors.

"I understand why employers feel the need for this... and especially with small and medium-sized enterprises, it may just be part of a template that's not updated with time."

hytay@sph.com.sg

The situation in other parts of the world

Non-compete clauses have come under scrutiny elsewhere in the world in recent years.

Most prominently, the United States' Federal Trade Commission mooted in January 2023 a total ban on these clauses, following an executive order issued by President Joe Biden in 2021 that encouraged the commission to curtail the use of these clauses.

The competition watchdog is expected to vote on its own proposal in April 2024.

It is spearheading the US move as it regards non-compete clauses as a way for companies to gain an unfair advantage over their competitors by restricting talent flows.

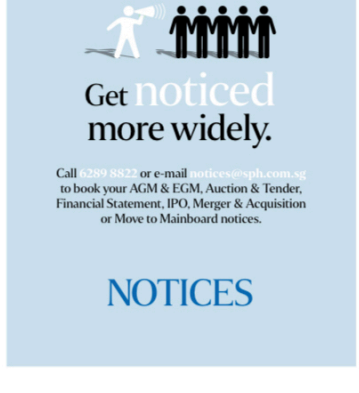
In Britain, the government announced in May a plan to limit the length of non-compete clauses to three months by law, to boost flexibility and dynamism in the labour market.

Other options it considered included introducing monetary compensation for the duration of a non-compete clause or an outright ban.

However, the UK Department for Business and Trade concluded in a study in the same month that mandating compensation would introduce extra costs to business, while an outright ban could preclude specific circumstances where a non-compete clause could enable investments.

As for Europe, employers in Italy, France and Germany must compensate employees who are subject to a non-compete clause.

Tay Hong Yi







How do I choose the right people to give me job references?

askST Jobs

In this series, manpower reporter Tay Hong Yi offers practical answers to candid questions on navigating workplace challenges and getting ahead in your career. Get more tips by signing up to The Straits Times' HeadSTart newsletter.

Q *How do I select the right referees to support my job application?*

A Referees are individuals who can vouch for a job candidate's skills and experience, as well as provide more detailed information on their work history and accomplishments.

Usually, the prospective employer's human resources staff would use the reference to address some questions and help verify points from the submitted resume, said Dr David Leong, managing director of human resource advisory firm PeopleWorldwide Consulting.

"A good referee should be able to provide the would-be employer with a detailed and accurate assessment of the candidate's skills, experience, work ethic and character," said Dr Leong.

"If the referees are immediate superiors, they should be able to provide specific examples of the candidate's work performance, such as their ability to meet deadlines, handle stress, work independently or as part of a team, and solve problems."

For jobs that require specific technical skills, the job seeker should take care to nominate a referee who can attest that the candidate holds the required skills, Dr Leong added.

But most importantly, he said, a good referee who has supervised the candidate or worked closely with them should be able to speak of their leadership potential, such as the ability to motivate others, take the initiative and lead by example. To select referees best placed to comment, Dr Leong suggested that candidates consider the professional relationship they have with the referee, the relevance of the referee's experience, and the referee's reputation.

They should also try to select referees who have diverse backgrounds, he said.

"Referees should be individuals who have worked closely with the job seeker in a professional capacity and can speak to their work experience and performance. This could include former managers, colleagues or clients."

Dr Leong added: "Job seekers should aim to include referees from a range of backgrounds and perspectives, including gender, ethnicity and age to demonstrate their ability to work with a diverse range of people."

The most influential referee is not necessarily the best referee, as such a referee may not have directly supervised you or been involved in your work, said Ms Loh Kaili, principal consultant for consumer and corporate services at recruitment firm RGF Singapore.

She said it is best to provide three referees: two who managed your work directly, and one who is a peer.

"A peer referee is useful when a would-be employer wants to know how well you can work in a team," she added.

To minimise the risk of an unfavourable reference, job seekers should obtain the referee's consent, said Dr Leong.

They should then inform their referees of the job they are applying for and provide a copy of their resume and cover letter.

"This can help to ensure that the referee has accurate and up-to-date information about the job seeker's skills and experience," Dr Leong said.

Job seekers should also provide their referees with context about their work history and achievements, and explain how these relate to the job for which they are applying.

Both Dr Leong and Ms Loh also underscored the importance of maintaining a positive working relationship with prospective referees, keeping in touch even after moving on and expressing gratitude for their support.

Ms Loh also advised job seekers to give the referee at least three to five days' notice so that they can plan ahead of time when they can complete any forms or speak to the potential new employers.

She added: "When a candidate is at the final stages of their interview, it is a good time to alert their potential referees that they might be contacted for reference checks."

• Have a question? Send it to askst@sph.com.sg

Hurrah to workers and their many ways

Office politics notwithstanding, the job always gets done in the end

Work/ Life



Krist Boo
Senior Business Correspondent



From: CopeeOh
To: DramaQuee, HupsTat, PauleeTek, TaichiOng, SullenSuk, BrookLik
CC: Boss
Subject: Labour Day Staff Party

Dear colleagues,

Labour Day is coming, which means we have to start organising the annual party for our 1,888 front-liners.

I am suggesting that we hold it on May 5, the Friday after the Labour Day long weekend which tends to get busy.

I also propose that we hold it in the conference hall this year. Given our business forecast, it might be prudent to spend less than we did for our last big bash in 2019.

We could still do a good event without the fancy carpets, canapes and flowers, and focus our expenses on wholesome, good food and entertainment. We will have a smashing goodie bag, of course, and the must-have lucky draw.

I think rank-and-file colleagues are looking forward to management's recognition of their year of hard work, and letting their hair down.

We have only 10 weeks to pull this together. What are everyone's thoughts? Thanks.

DramaQuee to all

Let me DIE. Ten weeks is not enough to put together an outfit, let alone a PARTY.

I will have to task two of my team members to come up with the guest list. With planning for the annual general meeting also going on, this will be a nightmare. ABSOLUTE NIGHTMARE.

Who will do the tender and shortlisting of caterers??? And do I have to mobilise my team to help with the food tasting???

Copee, given that you have a battalion of workers, I am not surprised that you have no idea how UNDERSTAFFED teams like mine will struggle.

My team members are already having to take sob breaks away from their laptops. Do you know how it feels to step away from Google Meet to cry, and then RETURN to the meeting???

And the mere thought of our employees posting pictures of the company party in our conference hall makes me blush with shame, quite frankly. What would our clients think?! Are we GOING BROKE???

We should all meet and discuss the event properly – the dress code, swag bag, colour theme, wine list... EVERY detail.

In the meantime, please do not take it upon yourself to make unilateral decisions.

TaichiOng to all

Copee, I am copying my assistant Minion, who will follow up.

PauleeTek to all

Copee, great ideas! I will do what I can to support!

HupsTat to all

Our employee numbers are 1,898, not 1,888. We have 11 weeks, not 10.

CopeeOh to all

Sullen, BrookLik, are you there?

SullenSuk to all

Yes. FYI: I wasn't involved in the organisation of the last bash.

HupsTat to Boss
CC: PauleeTek
(removing the rest)

Dear Boss,

For the Labour Day Staff Party, I suggest that we hold it at Mr Wan Yit Orh's golf club. He's a board member, and would be delighted if we give him the business since he owns the club.

I have checked the availability of his venue and we could do it on Labour Day. It's not that popular, so I think I can also negotiate a good discount. My dad plays golf with him.

Attached are my detailed workflow and budget.

I have also taken the liberty of coming up with the guest list, which includes all board members. I highlighted those who queried the salary disparity between the senior ranks and rank and file at the last meeting.

I have copied Paulee here. He could help me get the event going as soon as you give the go-ahead.

I am feeling very good about making this a very successful event to showcase our staff policies.

PauleeTek to HupsTat

Way to go, man! You have my full support!

Boss to HupsTat
CC: PauleeTek

K.

CopeeOh to all
CC: Boss

Dear all, Boss just told me that Chairman will be attending the party this year.

He has okayed my plan, including the budget, which will demonstrate our prudence in spending.

Can we do a quick get-together so we can get things moving?

HupsTat to CopeeOh

Boss agreed to my plan to hold the event at Mr Wan's golf club last week. I am already on it with the club's event organisers.

CopeeOh to HupsTat

Oh? He didn't say anything when he okayed my plan this morning.

CopeeOh to SullenSuk

See the upstart's e-mail below. Roll eyes.

SullenSuk to CopeeOh

The Dog said my husband had agreed to its plan to go to the beach this morning. He was already on it with his leash. He clearly had my husband's ear so I could go drown myself in the bath that I had run for him.

TaichiOng to all

Copee, Minion will attend the meeting on my behalf.

PauleeTek to all

Copee, great news to hear the plan's been approved. I will keep my week free for the meeting. We are behind you all the way!

Boss to all

My son came in first in our neighbourhood singing competition. Look at us in this picture, he is beaming with his trophy! (Mine is on the bookshelf behind!)

BrookLik to all

He really takes after you! I am sure he is not as good as you yet, though! You must sing at the party again this year! You absolutely must!

From: Boss
To: CopeeOh, DramaQuee, HupsTat, PauleeTek, TaichiOng, SullenSuk, BrookLik
Subject: Party Well Done!

Team, great job with the party yesterday! I knew you guys would pull it off, as always! Chairman was really pleased (though I had to embarrass myself)!

BrookLik to all

You were awwweeesome! I thought an angel had descended when you began to sing.

From: Us
To: Readers

Happy Labour Day!

kristb@sph.com.sg

Xtrackers II

Australia Government Bond UCITS ETF			
YTD	26/04/2023	231.85	AUD
Eurozone Government Bond UCITS ETF			
YTD	26/04/2023	226.80	USD
Singapore Government Bond UCITS ETF			
YTD	26/04/2023	147.16	SGD
US Treasuries UCITS ETF			
YTD	26/04/2023	200.04	USD

MARK TO MARKET

MAS consultations turn spotlight on prospecting and marketing activities of banks and insurers

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NOTICES

தமிழ் முரசு

Youth page

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联合早报
zaobaosg
2023年4月26日 星期三

精深局调查：

六成半年内找到全职工作
私校生起薪中位数3200元

精深技能发展局公布2021/22年私校毕业生就业调查，参与调查的学生在前年5月至去年4月之间毕业，来自27所私立教育机构。调查显示，在2400名已就业或积极找工作的毕业生当中，86.5%在毕业后半年内找到工作。从事全职工作的占60.9%；约20.5%从事兼职或临时工，其余约5.1%从事自由性质的工作。

胡洁梅　报道
ohkm@sph.com.sg

前年至去年毕业的私校学生中，约六成在毕业后的半年内找到全职工作，比率比上一届高14.5个百分点。

全职工作的起薪中位数为3200元，高于上届的2989元，但相较于公立大学毕业生的4200元，仍有一段距离。

精深技能发展局星期二（4月25日）公布2021/22年私校毕业生就业调查，参与调查的学生在前年5月至去年4月之间毕业，来自27所私立教育机构。这些私校共有约8800名完成全日制学士学位课程的毕业生。约41%毕业生参与调查，其中，已就业或在积极找工的毕业生有约2400人。

调查显示，这些归为经济活跃的2400名毕业生中，86.5%在毕业后半年内找到工作。从事全职工作的占60.9%；约20.5%从事兼职或临时工，其余约5.1%从事自由性质的工作。

全职就业率不如公立大学 月薪中位数低约1000元

全职就业率比上一届的46.4%理想，整体就业率也比上一届的85.3%略高。不过，相较于公立大学毕业生的就业率，私校毕业生的就业情况仍有差距。文告指出，公立大学毕业生的整体就业率为93.8%，全职就业率为87.5%，皆高于私校毕业生的就业率。薪资方面，私校毕业生的全职工月薪中位数是3200元，低于公立大学毕业生的4200元。

公立大学毕业生的就业率是根据新加坡国立大学、南洋理工大学、新加坡管理大学，以及新跃社科大学早前公布的联合调查，针对去年5月毕业的大学生。

2021／22年私校毕业生就业情况

私校	就业率	全职工就业率	月薪中位数	参与调查人数
百汇护理学院	93.8%	87.5%	4135元	16
新加坡管理发展学院	88.2%	70.6%	3500元	17
新加坡管理学院	88.5%	62.3%	3200元	1722
科廷教育中心	82.8%	60.9%	2950元	64
PSB学院	84.5%	60.8%	3000元	181
楷博高等教育学院	82.9%	57.7%	3000元	246
詹姆斯库克大学	75.8%	48.4%	3000元	95

资料来源／精深技能发展局　　早报图表
注：名单只反映有至少10名毕业生参与调查的学府

精深局指出，不同私校毕业生的就业情况各异，有意报读私校的学生，在做选校决定前，应留意各校毕业生的就业情况。

人力资源公司仁立国际执行董事梁昌国受访时说，经济在冠病疫情趋稳后逐渐好转，更多雇主恢复招聘，加上聘用外来人力的成本增加，企业可能更愿意考虑私立学府的毕业生，就业率也因此提高。但整体而言，雇主往往倾向于聘用公立大学毕业生，私校和公立大学毕业生的薪酬差距依旧存在。

精深局也在网站列出七所私校的毕业生就业数据，供公众参考。这七所私校有至少10名毕业生参加调查，它们包括百汇护理学院（Parkway College Of Nursing and Allied Health）、新加坡管理发展学院（MDIS）、新加坡管理学院、科廷教育中心（Curtin Education Centre）、PSB学院、楷博（Kaplan）高等教育学院以及詹姆斯库克大学。

其他学府因参加调查的毕业生人数少，当局未公布个别学府的具体数据。

Life • Explore Bangkok's newest hip district |C1&2



The Big Story • Panel proposes size limits for mobility devices on roads |A4



Singapore • Digital buddies at Kopitiam to ease card-to-app switch |A15



THE STRAITS TIMES

N. Korea • Two more missiles launched

North Korea launched two more ballistic missiles on Monday. The sister of leader Kim Jong Un said Pyongyang's use of the Pacific as its "firing range" would depend on the behaviour of US forces.

SEE WORLD • A7

Covid-19 jab • No other causes of death found

The death of a man was ruled as "likely to be related" to a Covid-19 jab he received 21 days earlier, not because the autopsy showed that was the cause of death, but because no other causes were found.

SEE THE BIG STORY • A2

Biden makes surprise visit to Kyiv ahead of invasion anniversary



United States President Joe Biden, seen with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, made an unannounced visit to the Ukrainian capital Kyiv on Monday, days before the first anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The visit was conducted covertly because of security concerns. In a speech, Mr Biden commended Ukraine's courage in the war. He also promised a further US$500 million (S$668 million) worth of weaponry, plus tighter sanctions on Russia. PHOTO: AFP

SEE THE BIG STORY • A6

More fresh university grads get full-time jobs, higher pay: Survey

Unemployment rate inches up but experts say not worrying, given global outlook

Amelia Teng
Education Correspondent

The job market turned more rosy for Singapore's fresh university graduates in 2022.

More of them secured full-time jobs and commanded higher pay in 2022 compared with the previous year, as the economy continued to grow and recover from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The latest graduate employment survey released on Monday showed that 87.5 per cent of fresh graduates in the labour force were in full-time permanent roles, compared with 84 per cent in 2021.

The median gross monthly salary among fresh graduates in full-time permanent jobs also rose smartly, from $3,800 in 2021 to $4,200 in 2022, results of the Joint Autonomous Universities Graduate Employment Survey 2022 showed.

Overall, 93.8 per cent of university graduates found permanent, freelance or part-time jobs within six months of graduation in 2022, a slight dip from 94.4 per cent in 2021.

Fewer graduates – 4.5 per cent – were in part-time or temporary work, compared with 8.7 per cent in 2021. The figure had climbed to 22.3 per cent in 2020, when Singapore faced its worst economic recession since independence.

But the unemployment rate for fresh graduates inched up from 5.6 per cent in 2021 to 6.2 per cent in 2022.

Graduates from several sectors, including health sciences and engineering, recorded the highest proportions in full-time permanent jobs. Those from information and digital technologies courses continued to take home the highest pay at $5,625, up from $5,000 in 2021.

Some 12,100 fresh graduates from full-time programmes in the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore Management University and Singapore University of Social Sciences participated in the 2022 survey, representing a response rate of 75.8 per cent.

They were surveyed by the four universities on their employment status as at Nov 1, 2022, about six months after the completion of their final examinations.

The surveys for the Singapore Institute of Technology and Singapore University of Technology and Design are ongoing.

Singapore's economy expanded by 3.6 per cent for the whole of 2022, down from 8.9 per cent in 2021. Policymakers expect gross domestic product to grow between 0.5 per cent and 2.5 per cent in 2023.

Observers said the slight increase in unemployment among fresh university graduates is not worrying, taking into account the broader global outlook.

Dr David Leong, managing director of recruitment company People-Worldwide Consulting, said: "Considering the significant disruptions and uncertainty in the global economy, including the Russia-Ukraine war, the slight dip in employment of 0.6 percentage point is negligible."

He added that the employment figures are a testimony to Singapore's resilience.

"Compared to the scale of global trouble, the slight increase in unemployment rate shows Singapore's businesses are holding up well," said Dr Leong.

CIMB Private Banking economist Song Seng Wun said: "The bottom line for graduates looking to join the labour force is that there are bright prospects, with the opening up of Singapore's economy creating more opportunities and the country continuing to attract more businesses to expand here."

The slight uptick in unemployment for fresh graduates is not a concern, he said. "Perhaps they are more picky and not in a rush to find work."

Universities said they will continue to prepare their graduates for work in a volatile and complex world, by equipping them with transferrable skills and providing crucial global exposure and internships.

ateng@sph.com.sg

SEE THE BIG STORY • A6

First of six one-stop SAF healthcare hubs launched

Lee Li Ying

The first of six one-stop healthcare hubs for service personnel in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) was officially launched at Kranji Camp III on Monday.

The Kranji Regional Health Hub (KRHH), which has been operational since September 2022, is a two-storey medical facility that has enhanced medical, dental, specialist and diagnostic capabilities under one roof.

It will serve as a central node for health services for the SAF camps in the north-western region, supporting Kranji camps I, II and III, Mandai Hill Camp, SAF Detention Barracks and Stagmont Camp.

Six Regional Health Hubs (RHHs) will be eventually established across Singapore, with the second at NS Hub in Bukit Gombak expected to be ready by 2024.

These hubs will offer enhanced medical services such as dental, radiological, laboratory, physiotherapy and mental wellness support. This is in addition to routine primary healthcare and emergency services.

Each RHH will cater for the specific needs of the SAF units in the surrounding camps.

A Ministry of Defence spokesman said the consolidation of healthcare services under one roof optimises resources by reducing duplicative processes, streamlining ground operations and improv-

CONTINUED ON PAGE A2

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2023年1月7日 星期六 联合早报 zaobaosg

理工院工教院教职员本月起加薪3.5%至10%

教育部说，理工院和工教院共有职员约9000人，包括非教员，人数过去几年相当稳定。当局没有透露这些学院的教员离职率，只说学院将继续定期检讨薪资，确保薪酬配套保持市场竞争力，以继续吸引并留住人才。

胡洁梅　报道
ohkm@sph.com.sg

继学校教师加薪后，理工学院和工艺教育学院各级教职员本月起也加薪，月薪增幅介于3.5%至10%。

五所理工学院和工艺教育学院去年联合展开薪酬检讨工作后，做出上述决定。这些学院自2017年起把大学毕业生和非大学毕业生的薪资结构统合为一，并定期检讨。

教育部星期五（1月6日）答复《联合早报》时说，这一轮加薪已在1月1日生效。上一轮薪金检讨于2020年进行，结论是当时的有关薪资大致符合人力市场的竞争力，因此没做出调整。

教育部说，理工院和工教院共有职员约9000人，包括非教员，人数过去几年相当稳定。当局没有透露这些学院的教员离职率，只说学院将继续定期检讨薪资，确保薪酬配套保持市场竞争力，以继续吸引并留住人才。

《联合早报》去年7月报道，这些学院联合招标，为检讨工作征求咨询服务。第一部分的工作是对薪酬结构进行市场基准分析，确保具竞争力；第二部分预计最迟在今年6月30日完成，重点包括对300个工作岗位进行分析与评估，确保学院职员在薪酬结构中的级别适当，以及制定一套框架或方法，加强学府吸引和留住具备紧缺技能人才的能力。

对于薪资调整，由于课题较敏感，有关职员在受访时都不愿具名。

受访教职员：应定期检讨级别制度与薪资上限

在理工院负责行政工作的一名林姓职员（40岁）透露，她在理工院工作已约10年，这次加薪9%，月入增至6000多元。不过，她觉得薪资早就应该调高了，而且晋升缓慢。她的薪金四年前已达到所属级别的上限，她认为级别制度与薪资上限也应定期检讨。

在理工院执教约10年的张姓讲师（51岁）也反映，她的薪金三四年前已达到上限，除了每年有表现花红，月薪停滞不前。“近期有通货膨胀的压力，加薪来得正是时候，也应该定期检讨升职的机制。”

在工教院执教的杨姓讲师（40岁）约五年前从工程领域转向教育工作。他过去几年都有常年加薪以及表现花红，对于这次加薪约4%感到满意。

他说：“教育工作固然需要热忱，但薪资也不能太差，才能够吸引人加入。”

人力资源公司仁立国际执行董事梁昌国受访时说：“政府正大力推动终身学习，大专学府须以具吸引力的薪酬配套来留住人才。学院也会面对私立学府对人才的竞争，有业务背景的教员也可能重返业界，定期检讨薪资是必要的。”

目前未见反映理工院和工教院薪俸的官方数据，但根据人力部的行业薪酬资料，截至2021年6月，归纳为技术、职业培训与商务教育机构教师与培训员的月薪中位数为4000元。某理工院在政府网站上征聘讲师时给予月薪5000多至7000多元。

教育部聘雇的3万多名教师、教育协作人员和教育部幼儿园教师已在去年10月加薪5%至10%。

INSIGHT

FORUM LETTER

Accepting circumstances does not mean that we have to like what's happening, it just means working with what we have.

SHERMAN GOH KENG HWEE, ON WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MISERY AND PEACEFULNESS **B7**

Is a master's degree necessary for that career move or a luxury item?

Not all postgraduate courses need state funding; not at a time when the country wants to equip workers with job-relevant skills instead of fuelling a paper chase.



Amelia Teng
Education Correspondent



Earlier in December, National University of Singapore (NUS) president Tan Eng Chye said the institution had started funding some of its master's programmes on its own, rather than rely on government subsidies.

Though NUS also clarified that this move had begun much earlier, the announcement was notable for the public signal it sent that the university will begin charging higher tuition fees for some courses, where it has not already. Drawing this inference, the news drew varying huge reactions, with some on social media suggesting locals will be "short-changed" and that the Government should continue to subsidise the cost of master's courses.

But such remarks conflate undergraduate education, needed for many entry-level white-collar roles, with postgraduate programmes, which may be motivated by a more diverse and nebulous set of goals. The comments also gave the impression that Singaporeans should be entitled to subsidies for a postgraduate degree if they wish to pursue further education.

A bachelor's degree is more likely to be a prerequisite for many jobs, and removing government funding for undergraduate programmes will reasonably draw concerns. But the vast majority of jobs, mid-career switches and efforts to climb the corporate ladder do not require postgraduate qualifications, which are, arguably, luxury items.

In any case, NUS will be charging more for only self-funded master's coursework programmes, whereas all of its research-based master's degrees will remain subsidised by the Government.

NUS also explained that selected coursework-based master's degrees continue to receive subsidies from the Ministry of Education (MOE), including the Master of Architecture, Master of Dental Surgery and Master in Public Administration.

WHY A MASTER'S HOLDS VALUE

Work and life aspirations have undeniably risen in Singapore in tandem with a more well-educated population. In a job market where the majority of people have bachelor's degrees – either from a local university, private institution or overseas – the thinking is that higher education can help people stand out from a crowd and secure better employment prospects.

Universities here know this and have correspondingly expanded their postgraduate offerings over the years. According to the Singapore Department of Statistics, the number of students enrolled in higher degree courses – defined as full-time and part-time postgraduate diploma and higher degree courses – grew steadily from 20,079 in 2016 to 23,417 in 2020, the latest year for which data is available.

These numbers are a surge compared with the past. In 1993, the earliest year data was recorded, the figure was 4,095. Engineering sciences, and business and administration were the top two fields for higher degrees that students enrolled in, followed by humanities and social sciences.

Now, depending on what type of postgraduate programme you take, you might get something valuable out of it that can aid in your next career move or teach you new foundational skills needed at your next job. Research-based master's programmes are taken up by those looking to pursue a career in academia or research, involving working on an independent research project and submitting findings in an original thesis.

Coursework-based master's programmes focus more on the impartation of knowledge and skills, and some are essential for individuals to progress in specific careers requiring technical training and specialisation, such as medicine, dentistry and architecture.

Then there are also programmes that may not be necessary but are deemed highly beneficial for one's career, like the Master of Business Administration (MBA), the world's most popular graduate management degree for executives gunning for promotions and better job outcomes.

Some people take up master's degrees to give themselves an edge in a certain professional field or to prepare themselves for a career switch.

In particular, foreigners, who make up a significant proportion of the enrolment in master's programmes at Singapore universities, are attracted to the prospect of holding a degree bearing the name of NUS, which has, in recent years, risen in prominence in global university rankings.

Even if the courses are not directly related to their work at that point, some might argue that there are intangible benefits – such as learning higher-order thinking and analytical skills, gaining wider perspectives across disciplines and making connections with individuals who have a valuable network.

MOVING AWAY FROM PAPER CHASE

In this discussion over whether postgraduate programmes should be funded and to what extent, while NUS has come under the spotlight and taken some heat, it is also worth noting that most other autonomous universities have differentiated funding support levels.

Most of Nanyang Technological University's master's by coursework programmes are already self-funded, following a revision that began in 2019 to make postgraduate programmes progressively self-financing.

The situation varies across the six autonomous universities – master's by coursework programmes at the Singapore Management University have always been self-funding, while its research-based master's programmes receive government funding.

All graduate programmes at the Singapore University of Social Sciences are self-funded, while all master's programmes at the Singapore Institute of Technology and Singapore University of Technology and Design are subsidised by the MOE.

With more coursework-based programmes being self-financed and the lowering of subsidies for foreign students and permanent residents (PRs) in recent years, the MOE said the annual savings are being channelled towards providing Singaporean and PR adult learners with more bite-sized upskilling opportunities more compatible with work.

This shift is timely and necessary, given that the cost of running university courses is substantial, and Singapore is moving towards arming workers with job-relevant skills rather than academic credentials alone.

Former education minister Ong Ye Kung had said back in 2017, when announcing the differentiation of master's fees for foreigners and PRs, that MOE faces the "reality of a finite budget" as it was investing more of its resources towards short training courses for adult workers.

In any case, the Government already heavily subsidises education for citizens, from pre-school all the way up to the bachelor's degree level, in the belief that every student should be given equal opportunities to succeed regardless of their family's financial background.

Whether this holds true for postgraduate education is debatable, especially for programmes that primarily aim to give individuals a competitive advantage over others in the job market or to simply enhance their own professional credibility.

Even then, government subsidies are not the be-all and end-all to securing financial assistance for a postgraduate degree. The universities give out their own scholarships, subsidies or study awards to those keen on doing their master's.

Both the public and private sectors also regularly sponsor employees for master's programmes – local and abroad – as part of their professional development, talent grooming and retention initiatives.

The Public Service Commission, for instance, awards scholarships to individuals based on merit to pursue master's degrees in areas relevant to the public service. Scholarship recipients then go on to a career in public administration and are posted to a ministry or statutory board, depending on needs and how suitable they are.

Apart from government agencies, the private sector also supports the pursuit of advanced degrees. OCBC Bank has a scholarship targeted at individuals interested in taking up a full-time postgraduate qualification in artificial intelligence, in line with its push to develop in-house capabilities.

These arrangements work well as recipients are, in a sense, tied to their organisations and what they study, hence, tends to be more targeted and relevant for their careers.

Employers generally do not accord much attention to whether a job candidate holds a master's degree – work performance and contributions are arguably more key considerations, Dr David Leong, managing director of human resource consultancy PeopleWorldwide Consulting, said

CONTINUED ON PAGE B2



Insidious but endemic • The 2022 dengue situation bears a striking resemblance to the 2020 surge | **B2**



Kishore Mahbubani • The World Cup of diplomacy | **B3**



Tech • 20 highlights of 2022 | **B4-5**

Online



PODCAST

Fighting the scourge

What will the loosening of drug consumption rules by countries in the region mean for Singapore? ST's Grace Ho and her guest share their thoughts.

str.sg/drugs-rules

The Straits Times says

Tackle Sino-Filipino tensions responsibly

As the New Year approaches it is evident that the contested waters in the South China Sea are hotting up, and not only because of climate change. On Dec 23, the Philippine Defence Department ordered its military to strengthen the country's presence in the West Philippine Sea, as Manila calls it, in reaction to alleged stepped up Chinese activity around Pag-asa Island. On Dec 20, reports citing satellite images from unnamed United States officials said that new Chinese-built land formations have emerged in the Spratlys, on Eldad Reef, Whitsun Reef, Lankiam Cay and Sandy Cay. China's foreign ministry called the report "completely groundless".

The Philippine Defence Department's action comes in the wake of a diplomatic protest that Manila launched with Beijing over a Chinese Coast Guard vessel "forcefully" taking control of debris from a Chinese rocket that had been retrieved by a Philippine Navy vessel off Thitu island. China characterises it as "friendly consultation". Whichever way it is described, what is clear is that the normal is being disturbed. The consequences are unlikely to be a happy one for all parties involved.

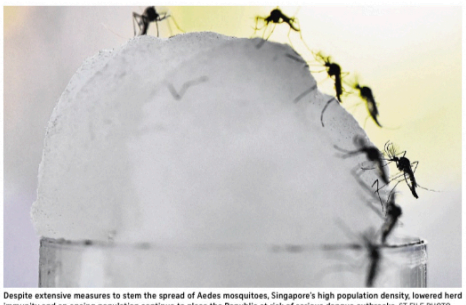
Even during China-friendly Mr Rodrigo Duterte's last months as the country's president, the Philippines moved to bolster its South China Sea defences, including with the purchase of shore-based cruise missiles jointly developed by Russia and India. Mr Duterte's overtures, which included underplaying the favourable arbitral ruling on South China Sea jurisdiction which Manila won from a United Nations arbitral tribunal, do not appear to have impressed Beijing sufficiently. Under current President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, Manila has also steered closer to Washington in strategic matters, and he has unambiguously flagged ties with the United States as a priority.

In turn, American officials have repeatedly assured Manila they would honour their treaty obligations if Philippine forces, ships and aircraft come under attack in the disputed South China Sea. Given the strategic location of the Philippines, whose northern part is close to Taiwan, any increase in tension around Manila's territorial waters or exclusive economic zone will have salience to the broader security situation. It is best then that all concerned play their part to tamp down potential flashpoints. Mr Marcos will pay a state visit to Beijing within weeks, and hopefully will be able to set ties on an even keel for the rest of his presidency. As it awaits Mr Marcos' visit, it would also be useful for Beijing to ponder how the Philippines, a nation that once defined its nationalism in anti-American terms, does so in anti-Chinese sentiments today. Mr Marcos, for his part, needs to ensure that his nation's strategic alignments do not come in the way of mutually beneficial bilateral ties with China, which remains an important economic and regional player.

Dengue numbers may swell again, so urgent mitigation efforts needed

The 2022 situation in Singapore bears a striking resemblance to the 2020 dengue surge, which offers actionable insights

Chan Kuan Rong



Despite extensive measures to stem the spread of Aedes mosquitoes, Singapore's high population density, lowered herd immunity and an ageing population continue to place the Republic at risk of serious dengue outbreaks. ST FILE PHOTO

While the world focused on beating back the Covid-19 pandemic over the past two years, another insidious but endemic disease has spread quietly through countries like Singapore.

More than 30,000 cases of dengue have been reported in Singapore in 2022 thus far, a sixfold increase from 2021.

Although infections peaked at 1,568 weekly cases in May and seem to be on the decline at 200 to 300 a week, these numbers remain far higher than the 2021 figures.

SIMILARITIES TO THE DENGUE WAVE IN 2020

This 2022 peak bears striking similarities to a wave seen in 2020, when cases surged to 1,792 weekly infections in July, according to the National Environment Agency (NEA). This was just after the circuit breaker curbs were lifted and more Singaporeans moved around and commuted for work, leisure and other activities. In both cases, the warm mid-year weather conducive to mosquito breeding and the greater movement of people created the perfect storm.

Virological studies confirm that a distinctive version of the dengue virus known as DenV-3, a less commonly found serotype in Singapore's dengue history for which the population has low herd immunity, caused the 2020 spread. Similarly, more than 86 per cent of cases thus far in 2022 were caused by this new, more transmissible and infectious DenV-3, according to the NEA.

The dengue virus exists as four distinct serotypes. Infection with one confers protection against only the infecting serotype and not the other three. Moreover, a second infection with a different serotype can increase the risk of severe dengue symptoms.

But the 2022 spike also throws into doubt the 2020 theory that more people caught dengue because they spent more time at home during the day. If anything, the larger numbers of people returning to workplaces as Covid-19 restrictions were eased in Singapore and travelling overseas as border rules were relaxed might account for the heightened threat.

This is consistent with Duke-NUS Medical School's Professor Ooi Eng Eong's ground-breaking 2006 study, which proved that dengue transmission largely occurred away from homes. His research found that schools, construction sites and factories had more mosquito breeding sites than residential areas inspected and that people, especially school-age children, were more likely to contract dengue if they spent more time outside of the home.

The drop in cases in 2021 may be a blip as the surge in Covid-19 infections – which cause symptoms similar to those of dengue, such as fever, muscle aches, nausea and fatigue – may have led to dengue cases going undetected and under-reported.

TACKLING DENGUE WITH NEW ANTIVIRALS AND VACCINES

Dengue is a major public health threat. Dubbed one of the top 10 threats to global health by the World Health Organisation just before the onset of Covid-19, the disease infects almost 400 million worldwide each year and kills about 40,000.

Based on the United States Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately one in 20 patients infected with dengue can get life-threatening haemorrhagic fever, which can lead to severe bleeding and organ failure, even though most patients do not present symptoms or have only mild symptoms. The very young, the elderly, the immunocompromised and those who are reinfected are the most vulnerable to severe dengue.

But countries have learnt from the history of medicine as well as from our collective Covid-19 experience that vaccination against endemic diseases is the most cost-effective strategy to reduce the burden of disease, and have moved swiftly to employ this strategy in tackling the scourge of dengue.

Although the currently licensed dengue vaccine in Singapore, Dengvaxia, is less effective for those with no prior exposure, the other leading vaccine, Qdenga, developed by Japanese pharmaceutical company Takeda and which uses the attenuated DenV-2 serotype as its genetic backbone, was recently approved for use by the European Union and is undergoing a fast-tracked review by the US Food and Drug Administration.

Another dengue vaccine, Butantan-DV, which uses inactivated forms of the four serotypes, has also shown promising outcomes in a recent study performed in Brazil. These vaccines should help reduce the severity and spread of dengue worldwide if clinical trials show strong efficacy and if they are eventually approved by the authorities for use.

A second lesson learnt from Covid-19 is that antiviral therapeutics can be a valuable addition to our toolbox in helping vulnerable patients manage disease symptoms. Currently, there are no licensed therapeutics that directly target the dengue virus.

But recent phase one clinical trials carried out by Johnson & Johnson found an antiviral compound, which blocks virus replication, to be safe and effective when administered in a prophylactic setting in animals. More studies will be needed to assess the efficacy of the drug in larger population cohorts and in human beings. The authorities will also need to ensure that we get the right vaccines and antiviral therapeutics that offer protection from specific emerging dengue virus variants in Singapore.

MAINTAIN PUBLIC VIGILANCE

Even as we keep an eye on the dengue situation and the development of useful drugs to arrest and treat the disease, Singapore should continue to be vigilant in its stringent vector control measures to stem the spread of Aedes mosquitoes.

Intense insecticidal treatment and site inspections of residences and commercial workplaces, complemented by persistent community education, where Singaporeans in schools and in community events are taught to perform the Mozzie Wipeout "B-L-O-C-K" steps to reduce the mosquito population by reducing breeding sites, have stemmed the spread.

However, despite these extensive measures, the high population density, lowered herd immunity due to reduced dengue transmission during the 1970s to 1980s, and an ageing population continue to place Singapore at risk of serious dengue outbreaks.

Innovative measures to contain dengue, like Project Wolbachia, which releases male mosquitoes carrying the Wolbachia bacteria in high-risk areas to reduce the mosquito population over time, have huge potential in reducing dengue caseloads in Singapore, but will take time to play out.

Preliminary studies have shown promising results, with significant suppression of the mosquito population and dengue cases seen within one year of Project Wolbachia mosquito releases in Tampines and Yishun. Targeted releases in parts of Choa Chu Kang, Keat Hong, Hong Kah North and Bukit Gombak have also dramatically reduced the mosquito population within the vicinity of where the releases took place.

These results are consistent with studies in Brazil and Indonesia, where dengue incidences were substantially reduced following the release of modified mosquitoes. However, more research is needed to determine if the effectiveness of using Wolbachia to curb the dengue situation in Singapore can be sustained over the long term. Research should focus on examining whether the dengue virus can evolve to confer resistance against Wolbachia, or if mosquitoes in the wild can develop mechanisms to evade invasion of modified Wolbachia mosquitoes.

MID-YEAR SWELL OF DENGUE INFECTIONS EXPECTED

Since the implementation of the vector control programme in 1973, the mosquito population in Singapore has been lowered to around two mosquito larvae found per 100 evaluated sites. Achieving complete mosquito elimination is impossible, as natural breeding habitats are created as quickly as they are removed.

With Project Wolbachia taking off, other factors such as herd immunity, increased movement and the introduction of new dengue strains and serotypes will contribute more significantly to any future spikes in the disease. Strains that are more transmissible are more likely to be dominant.

Will we see more peaks, or will dengue cases slowly taper off? Surveillance will remain important in predicting dengue outbreaks, as intensive research to pinpoint the virus' genetic sequences associated with the increased outbreaks is under way.

We may be experiencing a lull in dengue cases during the cooler year-end season before infections surge again during the warmer months of May to July – the prime season for mosquito breeding and biting activities.

But if the virus population can be successfully contained within the insect and human hosts, we may see dengue reach its endemic phase – as the numbers fluctuate at around 200 to 300 a week – until the introduction of a new DenV strain or serotype that can displace this current circulating strain.

• Dr Chan Kuan Rong is a principal research scientist in the Emerging Infectious Diseases programme at Duke-NUS Medical School.

S'poreans spoilt for choice in learning

FROM B1

that there are exceptions, like in consulting, where having an MBA is preferred.

"But a vast majority of jobs do not demand master's qualifications as the proof of worth is in a person's experience and precedent records like sales, connectivity to targeted key clients and familiarity with the industry. These other factors are critical determinants for wage-adjusted premiums since they contribute to revenue or sales in a company," he added.

MANY WAYS TO UPGRADE

At the end of the day, Singaporeans are spoilt for choice when it comes to options for learning beyond their undergraduate education. The desire of many Singaporeans to level up their skills, gain educational grounding and move up the career ladder is commendable and should be encouraged.

A rapidly evolving world of work means a basic diploma or degree may not be enough for most people to stay relevant in their jobs – the Government has made this clear with its push for lifelong learning and the institutes of higher learning taking on a bigger role in adult education.

But there are many ways to learn, from smaller stackable modules that provide targeted skills to fuller master's programmes. Beyond the traditional postgraduate qualifications, local institutions now offer more types of courses like micro-credentials, which may be more accessible to people and directly relevant to their work.

There are also a multitude of online courses and certificates one can earn on platforms, like Coursera, that provide flexibility for those who want to learn at their own pace.

In the light of the SkillsFuture movement and the many alternative pathways available to upgrade one's skills and knowledge, there is less of a case for government subsidies to be given to all master's programmes.

What is crucial is knowing how personal aspirations align with the realities of the job market and whether specific industries reward the pursuit of a master's programme.

The reality is that a master's degree is not meant for everyone. For most Singaporeans, it is a luxury good, which can cost anywhere from more than $30,000 to $100,000.

In fact, an overemphasis on gaining postgraduate credentials may even fuel an unhealthy and expensive paper chase.

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Been happy this year? Can we be happier next year?

Looks like not much may change in 2023

Work/ Life



Krist Boo
Senior Business Correspondent



Ask me! Ask me!

Have I been happy this year? Sometimes yes, sometimes not.

Next year? I don't know. Maybe yes, maybe not.

Happiness is such an elusive emotion to pin down, but today, we might get lucky by talking to Mr Jon Clifton, chief executive of pollster Gallup.

Mr Clifton has written a book called Blind Spot, a reference to how world leaders, eyes trained on growth, employment and productivity metrics, got blind-sided by rising misery in the last decade.

Mr Clifton writes with authority. Since 2006, Gallup has made more than five million surveys in over 140 countries, representing 98 per cent of the world's population – ranging from Danes to Afghans and Rwandans – in how they see their lives.

The 2021 findings were depressing.

The top one-fifth of the world population that were thriving rated their well-being at 8.9, up from 8.3 around 15 years ago. By contrast, the bottom one-fifth of those suffering rated their well-being 1.2, sinking further from 2.5.

The gap of 7.7 points in life rating between the top 20 per cent of the world and the bottom 20 per cent was the widest ever in Gallup's tracking.

"The indicator that I am most concerned about is what we call unhappiness, which is the aggregate of stress, sadness, anger, physical pain and worry," Mr Clifton said.

"That will continue to rise if world leaders don't focus on the underlying issues as to what is driving this misery."

Anguish and angst are also playing out in the workplace.

At the height of the pandemic (mid- to late-2020), up to 50 per cent of workers said their organisation cared deeply about their well-being. It began to slide dramatically down to 20 per cent.

"The drop in employee engagement took place from 2020 until now, and it's the first time that we have seen employee engagement drop in the US since the past decade," he said.

Singapore workers are not bucking the trend. In multiple surveys over the past two years, we regularly outrank the region when it comes to being disenchanted with our jobs, feeling burnout or harbouring delicious thoughts of quitting.

"Misery follows us home," Mr Clifton said. "We ask people who are the most miserable at work, 'does the stress and misery of work cause you to behave badly with friends and family?'

"And two-thirds say 'Yes'. So that means work-life balance is not addressing the fundamental problem: It's the workplace that is broken, not work."

About 80 per cent say they enjoy the work they do. But when asked about the workplace, their relationships with co-workers and bosses, "that's where the misery is", he added.

Singapore, which regularly tops global growth and development rankings, interests Mr Clifton enough to warrant a chapter. I can't say that it is flattering. He called us "The Emotionless Society".

Singaporeans surveyed in the years up to 2011 returned results that reflected neither strong positive nor negative emotions, he wrote.

We neither felt buckets of anger, stress, worry, sadness or pain, nor did we – when we were asked to think back a day before – feel vividly that we had been treated with respect, smiled and laughed a lot, enjoyed moments, were well-rested, and learnt or did something interesting.

Our insipidity, however, turned fiery when Gallup made public its 2011 findings.

"The findings were covered on the front page of The Straits Times for three days in a row, including a scathing dissent written by former Senior Minister of State for Law and Education Indranee Rajah," he wrote.

"Social media also erupted. 'That (poll) is a lie', commented one person. Another posted several videos on YouTube of a day in the life of an 'Emotionless Singaporean', which simply followed a Singaporean with an expressionless look on his face around Singapore," he added.

From "dead last" out of 148 countries in 2011, Singapore rocketed to 14th place in the positive experience index three years later, and has stayed in the top quartile ever since.

Our turnaround remains a curiosity to him. But if there is a country that could flip a red fail into an ace score and then get conferred as a model student for the world, it has to be Singapore.

"I'm very inspired by Singapore. At first, when we did this, less than 5 per cent of Singaporean employees were thriving at work. Today, that number has far more than quadrupled," Mr Clifton said.

"I'm very hopeful that that will continue. It feels like there's a real commitment to make things better."

Marketing manager Low Rui Yin counts running SGTech's LinkedIn account as part of her job. She had her target of 25,000 followers spelt out on a banner that stared back at her at her work desk.

She peeled it off recently.

"Sometimes what makes us unhappy is that we hope for something and we don't get it. We are just so caught up with hitting the KPI (Key Performance Indicator) that we don't appreciate the things we have," she said.

Ms Low has amassed over 17,000 followers: "I should be happy that we did that," she said.

She used to tear her hair out at her colleague, Mr Jason Lim.

"He has this Zen mode, whereas I am someone who wants things done very quickly. I just want the answer right now, give me the answer right now. Why is this not done? Why is this not perfect?" she said.

Perhaps it was because Mr Lim, who is also a life coach, spent 40 days in a coma after a motorbike accident in Cambodia eight years ago at the age of 24. It left him with burns, missing teeth and stuck in a wheelchair for over six months, dependent on his mother for showers and more.

"I think you cannot understand what is happiness unless you have experienced sadness," he said.

Historian Peter Stearns points out in an article for Harvard Business Review that happiness is a relatively modern concept propagated by the rise of America, industrialisation and consumerism.

"The smiling American was becoming a stereotype two centuries ago, as a new nation sought to justify its existence by projecting superior claims to happiness," he said.

Then the rise of the working class made it "convenient" to associate not only the rewards of work – earnings and social mobility – with happiness, but also values of hard work with contentment.

In the 1920s, the claim that individuals could grasp and gain happiness by their own means spawned self-help books, then consumer products and experiences from Happy Meals to Disney Magic.

In 1926, the song "Happy Birthday" was composed, and by the late 1930s, it had become a family staple, said Prof Stearns.

But many cultures, from East Asian to Latin American, Russian and even British, do not actually commit to seek out happiness in life, he pointed out – even though today, Happy Birthday is sung all over the world.

I get Prof Stearns. The Brits delight in being dour, the Chinese want long life, and the Japanese take gold for stoicism.

In Singapore, a little dot of little drama and catastrophe, I can't work up anything beyond a dull sense of contentment.

I live a little life, get irked by trivial annoyances and showboat inconsequential achievements.

I don't think much will change in 2023. Maybe that's Singaporean happiness.

Happy New Year!

kristb@sph.com.sg

How to change jobs during an economic downturn

askST Jobs

In this series, manpower reporter Tay Hong Yi offers answers to candid questions on navigating workplace challenges and getting ahead in your career.

Q *Is it a good idea to change jobs in an economic downturn?*

A It is not advisable to change jobs in an economic downturn without a firm offer, even at the stage where you are being interviewed for a new role, said Dr David Leong, managing director of recruitment firm PeopleWorldwide Consulting.

A job change, especially during a downturn, should enhance career prospects with higher wages, more learning opportunities, or more room for promotions.

Dr Leong said many employers are taking a pessimistic view of the first half of 2023, if not the entire year.

"There is generally a hiring restraint where resignations are not replaced. Until economic confidence is somewhat restored, the ground sentiments, at the current period until the first quarter of 2023, remain bleak and uninspiring.

"Hence, it is not advisable to leave a job for greener pastures at this time because this is an uncertain and gloomy period," he said.

However, Dr Leong added that those looking to migrate to a new industry or sector could use this period to take on government-sponsored training and grants to learn new skills with better pay and long-term prospects.

This would allow candidates to hit the ground running, re-entering the job market just when the economy picks up again.

Dr Leong said too many job transitions or long breaks that cannot be accounted for could adversely affect how hiring managers perceive a job seeker.

"The best advice is to curate a career pathway that is progressive, with each transition leading to a better role."

Mr Sachet Sethi, manager of technology and transformation at recruitment firm Robert Walters Singapore, said leaving a job during an economic downturn is not a good idea.

"So please make sure to do due diligence on what you really want, before you make your next career move.

"Some (job seekers) may be looking for professional growth, and others, a more stable organisation with good financial holdings," he said.

"During an economic downturn, switching jobs can be a gamble, depending on the (hiring) organisation's capacity to manage the lull period."

However, opportunities for economic growth typically follow a downturn, which means securing a new job is best done during this recovery period.

Mr Sethi said the hiring landscape in Singapore seems to remain strong, despite talk of a looming recession.

But job seekers should still consider factors such as the financial backing of the current organisation, along with their current working environment, which determines whether there are good long-term growth opportunities, he added.

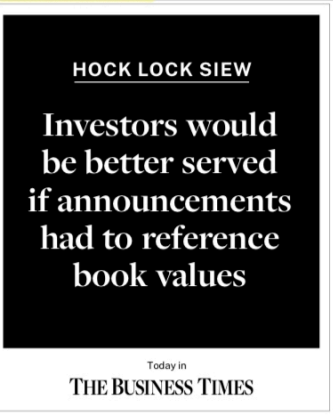
Echoing Dr Leong, Mr Sethi said that talents should not embark on a job search only after quitting.

"They should have some potential job opportunities lined up before they make a jump."

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• Have a question? Send it to askst@sph.com.sg.





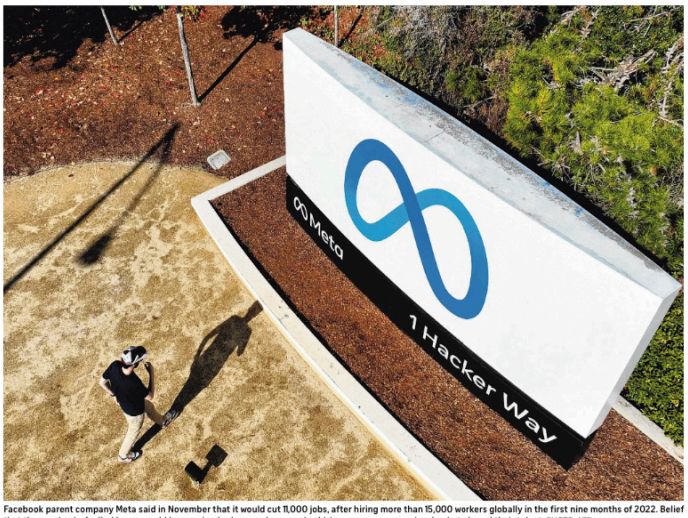


What tech job cuts mean for other industries

Experts look at the possibility of broader cuts and rehiring of those laid off

ST EXPLAINS

Irene Tham
Technology Editor



Facebook parent company Meta said in November that it would cut 11,000 jobs, after hiring more than 15,000 workers globally in the first nine months of 2022. Belief that the pandemic-fuelled boom would keep going had spurred aggressive hiring, even as companies dug in to hoard their talent. PHOTO: AFP

Last Wednesday, HP announced plans to eliminate 4,000 to 6,000 jobs – or as much as 10 per cent of its 61,000-employee global workforce – over the next three years, amid waning demand for personal computers that has crimped profits.

HP joined a string of tech companies wielding the axe on a global scale following the sector's entry into the bust phase of the economic cycle. To date, more than 800 tech companies globally have laid off more than 100,000 workers in 2022, according to Layoffs.fyi, a site that tracks layoffs.

The cuts came primarily from tech companies including Meta, Amazon, Twitter, Cisco Systems, Salesforce, Snap, GoTo, Grab, Sea and Netflix. Others, including Microsoft, Stripe, Shopify and Shopee, also recently announced layoffs.

The Straits Times answers some of the most commonly asked questions surrounding these cuts, including whether tech layoffs will lead to broader cuts in other industries and if the laid-off workers could be easily rehired.

Q *What are the drivers behind the tech layoffs?*

A Market observers and experts said the tech industry faces a perfect storm sparked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, opposition to intrusive advertising practices, fast expansions built on weak fundamentals and the collapse of cryptocurrencies. These factors have come together in an unprecedented time, when technology is so intertwined with everyone's daily lives.

The Russia-Ukraine war, which began in February, created a global energy and inflation crisis just as economies were coming out of the Covid-19 pandemic. The war is threatening to cause the world's leading economies to slide into recession, further crimping growth.

"Geopolitical tensions are seeing no signs of relief, and this triggers a domino effect," said Dr David Leong, managing director of People-Worldwide Consulting.

A new privacy feature that Apple rolled out in April 2021 also curtailed app makers' ability to collect data on users for personalised advertising.

Starting with Apple's iOS 14.5 and iPadOS 14.5, all apps are required to ask users' permission when they want to track them across third-party apps and websites. Users can also change their preferences for any app or block apps from asking for permission.

Facebook's parent company Meta had earlier in 2022 said Apple's new privacy feature would cut its sales in the same year by about US$10 billion (S$13.8 billion).

The collapse of cryptocurrency exchange FTX and the TerraUSD stablecoin have also wiped out investors' fortunes, affecting liquidity in the market, said Dr Leong.

The writing was on the wall when behemoths Meta, Twitter, Snap, Google, Apple and Microsoft all reported weaker quarterly earnings in July due to shrinking advertising budgets to cope with inflation.

Q *Weren't tech companies on aggressive hiring sprees just months ago?*

A Most of these hiring sprees were not built on strong business fundamentals, but on the excess liquidity in the market contributed by the Covid-19 pandemic bubble.

Tech companies' revenue and market capitalisation rose in unprecedented fashion during the pandemic as spending surged on computers, video games, online retail, advertising and cloud computing services.

Combined yearly revenue for the five biggest United States tech companies – Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, Google's parent Alphabet and Facebook – grew by a fifth to US$1.1 trillion in 2020. Their combined market capitalisation also soared to a staggering US$7.5 trillion at the end of 2020, from US$4.9 trillion at the end of 2019, according to The Wall Street Journal.

Similarly, global venture capital funding in 2021 broke records, reaching US$643 billion, almost doubling the amount in 2020, according to Crunchbase, which tracks investment and funding information. Accompanying the excess liquidity was a surge in the number of unicorn start-ups valued at more than US$1 billion in 2021. Crunchbase added 586 unicorns in 2021, up from 167 additions in 2020, bringing the total number of global unicorns to more than 1,100 in 2021.

They were collectively valued at US$3.8 trillion that year.

Belief that the pandemic-fuelled boom would keep going spurred aggressive hiring, even as companies dug in to hoard their talent. This sent tech salaries to new heights across the entire tech sector. Meta, for one, hired more than 15,000 workers globally in the first nine months of 2022. In November, when Meta said it would shed 11,000 jobs, or 13 per cent of its global workforce, its chief executive Mark Zuckerberg told employees he miscalculated.

Mr Tan Yinglan, founding managing partner of Insignia Ventures Partners, said: "The technology sector is crumbling under the weight of its growth amid global market headwinds.

"Particularly, hiring sprees for many tech companies were fuelled by premiums not necessarily built on actual growth or profitability."

When rising inflation hits, causing spending and investor funds to tighten, the pressure on boards to reprioritise expenses for financial sustainability builds. In such an environment, the premiums paid to hoard tech workers can no longer hold.

Q *What sort of premiums were paid for tech workers?*

A In Singapore, some tech workers saw their salary almost double when they switched jobs in 2021, compared with increments of between 10 per cent and 30 per cent in 2020, according to tech career platform NodeFlair.

In the third quarter of 2021, monthly salaries for lead engineers went up to an eye-popping $16,000, from $12,000 in the first quarter of the year. Even entry-level software engineers could command monthly salaries anywhere from $3,000 to $7,250 in the third quarter of 2021, according to NodeFlair, based on more than 5,600 data points including job listings and users' payslips or offer letters.

Q *Will the tech cuts broaden to other sectors?*

A For now, it does not look like the cuts will spill over to other sectors, barring a prolonged recession or a black swan event.

Mr Tan said: "The job cuts are directly related to how tech companies have been spending in recent years. This is unique to the sector."

He believes that companies in other sectors may be better equipped to handle the economic shocks of global inflation.

Dr Leong said the massive tech job cuts are not linked to structural financial sector weaknesses.

"When the big elephants start to retrench, instinctive herd responses follow," he said. "The fears are primarily sentiment-driven. It is not an economic implosion like the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008 or the Asian financial crisis in 1997."

Job cuts are not expected to spill over to other industries and sectors, unless a black swan event emerges, he added. Such an event is unpredictable and has potentially severe consequences. This includes another war or a financial market collapse.

The writing was on the wall when behemoths Meta, Twitter, Snap, Google, Apple and Microsoft all reported weaker quarterly earnings in July due to shrinking advertising budgets to cope with inflation.

In a Nov 17 note, Morgan Stanley analysts drew similar conclusions: Major job cuts in non-tech industries are unlikely in the US as the economy at large remains short-staffed, CNBC reported. The analysts said the large market cap of tech companies and "idiosyncratic" hiring in tech relative to the rest of the labour market have resulted in tech layoffs having an outsized impact on perceptions.

Q *Will the releasing of tech workers finally ease the longstanding manpower crunch in the tech sector?*

A Now that talent hoarding among big tech companies has eased, some experts said smaller companies starved of tech resources may finally be able to plug their manpower gaps.

"One of the things the layoffs has shown is just how massive the pool of tech talent is," said Mr Tan. "This could be a good time for companies better equipped to hire to provide new opportunities for talent seeking jobs in the market."

The Singapore Government is among those keen to fill immediate tech manpower gaps. Last Thursday, the Open Government Products and the Smart Nation and Digital Government Group launched an online platform called Tech for Public Good to get interested parties, including those who had lost their jobs recently, to apply for about 700 software engineering, product management and design jobs.

US-based Generation, which provides training for the unemployed, said it is still seeing demand for tech talent, especially in Web and software development, cloud operations and data analytics.

"A lot of hiring in Singapore has been driven by small and medium-sized enterprises; we're expecting to still see this demand," said Mr Jeremy Fox, the organisation's Asia-Pacific chief executive.

But finding the right fit may still be hard. A list circulating in Singapore that contains the details of close to 200 laid-off tech workers trying to find jobs shows that the majority of the affected roles are in human resources and recruitment, followed by marketing. Engineering roles come next, but these are mostly junior functions.

There are around 70 laid-off Meta employees on this list. More than 30 laid-off workers came from Stripe. There is also a handful of former Shopee, Tencent and Twitter staff.

Mr Fox said reskilling and upskilling may be needed for many of these affected workers to find re-employment.

The boss of a tech distributor in Singapore, who wanted to be known only as Mr Tan, told The Straits Times that the tech supply chain industry is starved of workers, including programmers, warehouse workers and product managers with local knowledge. But there is no match for his company's needs among those laid-off workers.

"Most of these functions were created in multinational firms as part of turf expansion; these roles are not useful to me," said Mr Tan, a tech veteran of more than three decades.

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THE STRAITS TIMES

Must-reads

THE BIG STORY

Xi, Biden to get China-US relations back on track

Chinese President Xi Jinping and his US counterpart Joe Biden expressed the desire for their countries to work together to manage tensions and avoid conflict. They were meeting in person on Monday, the eve of the G-20 summit, for the first time since Mr Biden took office almost two years ago. **A1**

BUSINESS

HSBC sees Singapore as critical market: Group CEO

Banking heavyweight HSBC views Singapore as a critical market with key opportunities in corporate banking and wealth management, said group chief executive Noel Quinn. The bank aims to double its wealth business here by 2025. It is also targeting double-digit growth in its commercial banking business in Singapore. **A22**



The site of the future Jurong East Integrated Transport Hub, which will house Jurong Regional Library as well as a community club, a sports centre, offices and retail space. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

SINGAPORE

Jurong library getting new home at upcoming transport hub

Jurong Regional Library will be relocated to the upcoming Jurong East Integrated Transport Hub, which is slated for completion in 2027. The hub will also house a community club, a sports centre, offices and retail space. The relocated library – expected to open in 2028 – will be more accessible and convenient, given its location beside Jurong East MRT station. **A14**

LIFE

A Singaporean in wallet-friendly Cape Town

Cape Town, South Africa, has echoes of other popular places. Its wine country evokes Tuscany, and its beaches have an Australian vibe. But Cape Town has its own merits. It is a world-class city with wallet-friendly prices that boasts international cuisine, vibrant art and landscapes teeming with wildlife. **C4&5**



PHOTO: COURTESY OF CAPE GRACE

INSIGHT

Eight high-profile layoffs by tech firms in 2022

Many tech companies have slashed jobs this year to curtail ambitions and brace themselves for tough times amid economic uncertainties, reversing their 10-year stock bull run. Check out this round-up of the layoffs announced by eight prominent technology firms in recent months. **B4**

SPORT

'Most physical' World Cup expected in Qatar

The 2022 World Cup, which kicks off on Sunday, is expected to be the "most physically competitive", said Mario Jovanovic, former conditioning coach for Croatia's national youth sides. The tournament is in the middle of the football season for the first time, hence players are fresher, he said. **B16**

Flaws in US study on Covid-19 reinfection posing higher risk: Experts

Study involving American veterans gave little information on underlying conditions

Salma Khalik
Senior Health Correspondent

An American study suggesting that people who are infected with Covid-19 for a second time are at higher risk of organ failure and death is questionable, with inherent limitations and overstated conclusions, say local experts.

The retrospective study by the Washington University School of Medicine and the Veterans Affairs (VA) St Louis Health Care System looked at nearly 41,000 VA patients who had two or more documented infections and 444,000 who were infected for the first time, out of a patient population of 5.8 million.

Using statistical modelling, the researchers concluded that patients with reinfections were twice as likely to die and three times more likely to be hospitalised than those infected for the first time.

Professor Ooi Eng Eong, an expert in emerging infectious diseases at Duke-NUS Medical School in Singapore, said he was "appalled at how this study got through peer review" and was published in the Nature Medicine journal last week.

The study said those reinfected were 3.5 times more likely to develop lung problems and three times more likely to suffer heart conditions. Prof Ooi pointed out that the study gave "very little information on what chronic diseases the cases with reinfection had".

Nor did it look at patients who had other respiratory infections to find out if the higher risk was Covid-19-specific or if any viral infection exacerbated their underlying chronic diseases.

Agreeing, Professor Paul Tambyah, a senior infectious diseases consultant at National University Hospital (NUH) and president-elect of the International Society for Infectious Diseases, said the study had major problems.

The reinfection and first-time-infected groups were very different. From the study data, those in the reinfected group were "three times more likely to be immunocompromised and nine times more likely to be in long-term care", he pointed out.

The absolute number who were reinfected was also very small – 41,000 out of 5.8 million veterans.

Prof Tambyah said: "It is hard to interpret the data and not possible to draw meaningful conclusions for any population outside of the VA."

He added that Singapore's experience is different. Health Minister Ong Ye Kung said in October that with the XBB wave, the reinfection rate here hit as high as 18 per cent.

Dr Shawn Vasoo, clinical director of the National Centre for Infectious Diseases, said local data from October to mid-November "does not suggest worsened clinical outcomes in reinfections compared with first-time infections".

The percentage of people who suffer from severe illness – requiring oxygen, in intensive care or dying – was 0.2 per cent for patients previously infected and 0.3 per cent for those getting an infection for the first time, he added.

Dr Vasoo said the patients in the VA study tended to be older male patients, with more who smoked or had serious medical problems, so the results might not apply to the general population.

Professor Dale Fisher, a senior infectious diseases consultant at National University Hospital who also chairs the World Health Organisation's Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network steering committee, said the paper confuses association with causation.

He was referring to the statement that "the findings show that reinfection further increases risks of all-cause mortality and adverse health outcomes in both the acute and post-acute phases of reinfection".

He said: "People with disadvantage due to their socio-economic status inflicting health inequities are more likely to have risk factors and poor control of those risks. They are also less likely to be able to avoid repeat infections. Because of their underlying health... they are more likely to die in the next six months, but it doesn't mean it is because of Covid-19."

But Prof Fisher also said the study sends a timely reminder that even at this stage of the pandemic, there is good reason to avoid Covid-19 infection.

Dr Vasoo said: "Vaccination protects against serious illness, for first and subsequent bouts of Covid-19. Reinfections are generally mild if you are vaccinated and remain up to date with your vaccinations."

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The reinfection and first-time-infected groups were very different. From the study data, those in the reinfected group were "three times more likely to be immunocompromised and nine times more likely to be in long-term care".

Businesses, HR experts welcome wage guide but say this should be backed by productivity growth

Guidelines also call for firms to implement flexible wage system

FROM A1

Lastly, employers that have not done well may exercise wage restraint, with the management leading by example. Lower-wage workers should get a built-in wage rise at the lower band of the 5.5 per cent to 7.5 per cent range of their gross monthly wage.

The guidelines for lower-wage workers apply to those who are earning a gross monthly wage of up to $2,200, which covers about a fifth of full-time employed residents.

In coming up with the guidelines, the NWC noted that employees had taken wage cuts or freezes and supported other cost-cutting measures, and it said it is thus only fair that they are duly compensated when the economy picks up.

National Trades Union Congress president Mary Liew said "employers should recognise employees' contributions over the last two years, particularly those in the hardest-hit sectors, who may have taken wage cuts during the Covid-19 pandemic".

NTUC deputy secretary-general Desmond Tan urged employers to also factor in the current inflation rates when they make wage increment decisions so as "to ensure real income growth for our workers".

Inflation in Singapore is at its highest levels in over a decade, with headline inflation projected at 6 per cent for 2022, higher than the 2.3 per cent recorded in 2021. Core inflation, which excludes the costs of accommodation and private transport, is projected to average around 4 per cent, higher than the 0.9 per cent in 2021.

The guidelines, which cover the period from Dec 1 to Nov 30 next year, also called for employers to implement the flexible wage system if they have not done so. This is because economic uncertainties ahead underscore the need for resilience and flexibility in wage structures, noted the NWC.

A flexible wage system includes a fixed component, which is the fixed basic monthly pay, and the variable component, which includes a monthly variable component or an annual variable component, built into the gross salary.

This will ensure employers can restore wages quickly when business recovers, or cut wages during periods of economic uncertainty. It also gives employees greater job security as companies can cut costs instead of jobs.

Mr Lim Wen Sheng, deputy general secretary of the Food, Drinks and Allied Workers Union, which represents employees in accommodation, food manufacturing, food retail and food services, said all companies should reward workers with a fair wage adjustment and variable payment to help them cope with rising inflation.

The NWC said that as wages pick up, productivity has to go up to justify the rise in wages, and while productivity has increased in the first half of 2022, employers should continue with business transformation and job redesign initiatives.

Labour productivity, as measured by real value-added per actual hours worked, has also improved by 1.5 per cent on a yearly basis in the first half of 2022.

Dr Robert Yap, president of the Singapore National Employers Federation, said the momentum of business transformation had accelerated during the pandemic.

Employers should push on to remain competitive, he said, adding that workers also have to upskill and reskill constantly and consistently to keep pace with the changes.

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The National Wages Council has recommended a "fair and sustainable" rise in wages from Dec 1, 2022, to Nov 30, 2023. Companies are encouraged to beef up the flexible wage component of employees' pay to achieve this. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

The Association of Small and Medium Enterprises (Asme) has welcomed the National Wages Council's (NWC) new wage guidelines, as the broad framework gives businesses the room to tailor implementation of the wage increases on a case-by-case basis.

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) employ about 70 per cent of the workforce, according to a UOB report.

Mr Ang Yuit, vice-president of Asme, said that "as an association, we want to encourage the business owners to adopt the guidelines of flexible wages and implement what works for their business".

The NWC has recommended a "fair and sustainable" rise in wages for the period from Dec 1, 2022, to Nov 30, 2023.

To achieve this, companies are encouraged to beef up the flexible wage component of pay.

Lower-wage workers also get higher wage increments of 5.5 per cent to 7.5 per cent, or at least $80 to $100, up from the range of $70 to $80 in the past year's guidelines.

Dr David Leong, managing director of HR consulting firm People-worldwide Consulting, said employers should consider wage adjustments to retain workers and hire more.

He added that working on the monthly variable component is the most sensible way for companies to increase wages as it can be adjusted when times are difficult.

This ensures they do not lose their talents and, when the business environment picks up, "their core team is intact and the rank and file are ready to run", he said.

Ms Tricia Liverpool, general manager of executive recruitment firm Cornerstone Global Partners, said employers should look at more regular salary reviews for high-performing employees and give bigger bonuses as a reward for productivity.

She said non-financial benefits are also important and "could include perks like hybrid working as an option for those who need it, more days off, improved healthcare plans and an investment on learning and development".

For lower-wage workers, like security guards, cleaners and landscape workers, the wage increase is also welcome.

Mr Toby Koh, group managing director of security services company Ademco Security Group, said the security guard industry is facing a severe shortage of manpower and if salaries do not go up, it will not be able to attract better and younger talent into the trade.

"We are paying above-market rates. Let's not talk about the very new hires with no experience. With experienced staff, they are definitely getting above the market norms," he said.

As wages rise, the Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) said this should be supported by productivity growth.

SNEF said real total wage growth, which include bonuses, was 2.7 per cent a year between 2016 and 2021.

During that period, productivity growth was 3.2 per cent per annum as wages grew at a slower pace, against the backdrop of a weaker economy.

Asme's Mr Ang said productivity has already been affected by the high manpower turnover SMEs are facing.

"There is a lot of movement in the job market. When you lose people, you need time to find and train people. We are seeing this in the last nine months, ever since opening up (after the pandemic)," he said.

To boost productivity, NWC said employers should continue with business transformation and job redesign initiatives.

Employees should also reskill and upskill to ensure their skills remain relevant in the current environment.

Ademco's Mr Koh said the industry is already using technology to boost productivity and trying to get clients to understand how technology can complement the physical security guards on site.

He said there are instances where technology can do a better job and there are instances when human judgment is still necessary.

"Why do we still want guys to do endless patrols around our premises? Wouldn't computer vision actually be more efficient than human eyes?" he said.

But he added that when someone is seen loitering, a security officer would still need to go and chat with the person to assess if there is a threat.

Chor Khieng Yuit and Clara Chong

Does working overtime more when at home mean you are inefficient?

askST Jobs

Manpower reporter Tay Hong Yi offers practical answers to candid questions on navigating workplace challenges and getting ahead in your career.

Q: I HAVE A TENDENCY TO WORK OVERTIME, ESPECIALLY WHEN I WORK FROM HOME. DOES IT MEAN I AM AN INEFFICIENT WORKER?

A If your job scope has not dramatically changed, yet you work longer hours at home, you need to reflect on what is causing you to do these longer stints, said Mr Paul Heng, NeXT Career Consulting Group managing director.

The reasons may be self-imposed, circumstantial or relate to lower productivity, he said.

Self-imposed reasons include working longer hours to prove to yourself and your co-workers that you are still productive even while working remotely, given a perceived need to compensate for being out of physical reach of your colleagues.

"After a career-long practice of working at a proper workplace, we feel guilty of 'not going' to work," said Mr Heng.

Circumstantial reasons may include family and other commitments punctuating the work day more than back in the office, requiring a longer work day to complete the same tasks, he added.

Meanwhile, lower productivity could result from additional time needed to complete the same assignment compared with working in office.

"(When) working in the office, we can simply walk over to our colleagues' desk to get their input, but when working remotely, we may need to schedule a time, or to send a short message before we can get their input," Mr Heng noted.

If you can find valid reasons against working longer hours, such as worsening health or family ties, you should set clear work targets for the day or week, or a maximum number of hours you work past your usual time when you were in the office.

However, there is also nothing wrong with working longer hours if you enjoy your work and doing more of it makes you feel happy, Mr Heng added.

In return for the autonomy to manage what their work hours are, as well as the time saved on commuting, those working from home should be prepared to work longer hours when their job requires, said Dr David Leong, managing director of human resource (HR) consultancy PeopleWorldwide Consulting.

"The assignment of work is based on outputs and deliverables. Therefore, how, what and when to deliver is left to the workers' discretion. Employers are likelier to be concerned about results and the set timelines."

This means you should discuss with your bosses how much time you would need to complete an assignment or project, and commit to this plan.

You should then inform your bosses and seek their approval if more time is needed, Dr Leong said.

Meanwhile, those who are still concerned about clocking too many hours while working from home should clearly express their preference to return to the office so that they can revert to more fixed hours, he said.

"Workers who prefer fixed hours of work should not expect the benefits of working from home and yet count hours in the same way since they control their hours of work," he added.

HR expert Mayank Parekh, who was previously chief executive of the Institute for HR Professionals, said that employees may be tempted to continue working for longer than usual as they have full access to work all day at home, unlike leaving work at the office.

Working remotely in a new environment, such as the library or a cafe, could help energise you and increase your productivity, he added.

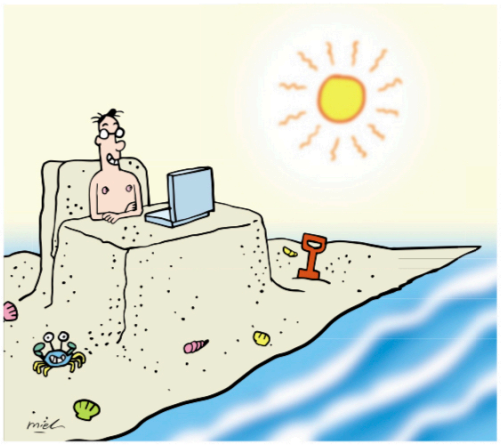
"Commuting provides a mental break, and tearing yourself out of the same environment refreshes your thinking."

hytay@sph.com.sg

• Have a question? Send it to askst@sph.com.sg.

Same old thing, in person or on Zoom

Remote or in office makes little difference to output when people are the same



Work/ Life



Krist Boo
Senior Business Correspondent

Hello! Morning, morning, everyone!

9AM, NOV 14, 2021

Today's meeting is to discuss the drafting of this year's sustainability report. Everyone who's got the Zoom link is here?

Susan having trouble calling in? Someone resend the link to Harry, please.

Okay now? It's Coffee Monday. I am SUPER excited that we are having morning coffee together. Everyone's got the pandemic coffee mug we sent? Show me! Show me! Let's raise our mugs, to Caffeine Mug-Day!

Okay, so COP26 ended in Glasgow two days ago, which is timely because here we are, saving the planet by meeting on Zoom.

I am thinking, for the section on team members' contribution this year: How about each of us calculating the amount of carbon emissions we save just by NOT going into the office?

All like the idea?

You all know that I drive a Po... PLONG!.

I drive a red Por... PHHTTTRRR...

Susan, is that you? Can you mute your mic, please? Have you guys seen my Porsc...

Yes, Harry? Take it further and calculate the savings with a four-day week? Okay, okay, what was I saying...?

By the way, Harry, are you at the golf course? Remove that virtual background so I can see where you are, please. If we were in the office, I wouldn't have to hear you to know if you are quiet quitting, I just need to smell you.

Back to the report, we can substantiate it with this Harvard Business Review article by professors Ganga Shreedhar, Kate Laffan and Laura Giurge.

Hold on... let me share my screen.

Here, the study says global carbon emissions fell 17 per cent in April 2020 compared with peak 2019 levels, due to "dramatic changes in mobility, production and consumption patterns of remote work".

Yes, Mary? Oh. The article adds that emissions are back at pre-pandemic levels, even though workers are not.

Let me scroll down: "Indeed, our research also shows that work-from-home is not a clear win for the environment. The net sustainability impact depends on several employee behaviours, from travel to energy use, to digital device and waste management. It also depends on several situational factors like home building and local infrastructure."

Can we pretend that we never saw that? Too complicated.

Any questions? I see a raised hand. Angel? Are you the new girl? Should we trash the office trash bins, since no one will be in the office? Of course, clever girl!

Anyone else? Second raised hand. Yes, my angelic Angel? How about recyclable toilet paper? Do they exist? But sure, we can look into that.

Oh – raised hand again, this time with a love emoji. Yes, my cookie monkie? Do I like Taylor Swift or Billie Eilish? Who do you prefer?

Next, let's get to the main thing..

Oh! Our 40-minute free Zoom time is almost up. Can we reschedule another meeting, same time tomorrow?

Before you go: Friendly reminder of Zoom cocktail party this Friday evening. Everyone is expected to dress up and interact in front of your screen. Videos on, please. Bob is sponsoring the martini deliveries. I told him that you guys will turn up, so don't show me up.

9AM, NOV 14, 2022

Is everyone here? Harry is on the way? Where's Mary – stuck in traffic?

Everyone is finally here? Are we short of chairs? Susan, can you go next door and grab a couple?

Why can't we ever start on time?

Today, we have to decide what to include in our 2022 Sustainability Report. This year, I am thinking that we focus on our employees being back in the office, collaborating and creating SUPER-innovative solutions to save the planet.

I already have a title in mind: GREEN Work-And-Save Helpers.

We should talk about how in-person collaboration is strengthening the office green culture; we all eat more and waste less when we lunch together, right?

We are also replacing a vast number of calls and e-mails by reading body language. Also, the plants on Mary's desk are making oxygen again.

We can substantiate this section with this Harvard Business Review article by professors Ganga Shreedhar, Kate Laffan and Laura Giurge. I think it says that working from the office may not be so bad for the environment after all.

More data? Just say that Tim, Elon and Jamie say so, okay? If someone challenges that, ask him if he were so smart, why isn't he running Apple, Tesla or JP Morgan Chase?

Now, Sally's idea to trash the trash bins this year was brilliant. We should put it in the chapter on team members' contributions. She's an intern, right?

And let's highlight the islandwide treasure hunt last month. Imagine, 5,000 team members fanning across Singapore to hunt down Mushroom, our green mascot.

I think we outdid ourselves. Spread S'pore to find Mushroom. How smart is that?

I also thought that the idea to give the winner two business-class tickets to Finland was brilliant. Everyone is dying to fly after the pandemic. Promoting nature tourism is so apt for our climate-change advocacy.

May I add that Mary's idea to put reindeers on those posters to remind us to take public transport is ingenious. I couldn't take my eyes off those banners whenever I go into the back-of-house.

Huh? No, yes, what has my Porsche got to do with this? We have no reindeers here, okay?

Any questions? Nothing from you, Angel? You seem bored. You are not one of the 64 per cent of workers planning to quit just because you got called back to the office, right? You must not believe those people from ADP Research Institute. They are not good for you, or for the company.

In any case, Bob wants me to remind all of you that we sell real estate for a living. If you do not show up with your warm body in our office building for at least 40 hours a week, he will "assume that you have resigned".

Harry, you have to go? Client meeting? Susan, vendor lunch? So early? Mary, you have a next meeting?

Sucks. We have barely reached the main section.

Let's meet again tomorrow morning.

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Xtrackers II

Australia Government Bond UCITS ETF			
1C	08/11/2022	120.46	AUD
Eurozone Government Bond UCITS ETF			
1C	08/11/2022	207.81	USD
Singapore Government Bond UCITS ETF			
1C	08/11/2022	137.46	SGD
US Treasuries UCITS ETF			
1D	08/11/2022	189.22	USD



Tamil Murasu World Cup podcast tomorrow

www.tamilmurasu.com.sg

MARK TO MARKET

Gear's break-up and delisting lowballs minority investors and does nothing for the environment

Today in THE BUSINESS TIMES
A publication of SPH

Pesilat negara berkalung emas di Kejohanan Dunia



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HDB resale prices continue uptrend, rising 2.6% in Q3

They climb for 10th straight quarter but at slower pace due to inflation, rate hikes

Isabelle Liew

Prices in the Housing Board (HDB) resale market edged up for the 10th consecutive quarter, with price growth slowing amid inflation and rate hikes.

Resale prices rose at a slower pace of 2.6 per cent in the third quarter of 2022, compared with 2.8 per cent in the second quarter, data released by HDB on Friday showed.

Property analysts said that the slower price growth reflects economic conditions – buyers may be less willing to pay more for a home due to rising expenditure.

OrangeTee & Tie senior vice-president of research and analytics Christine Sun said: "Rising inflation will limit what buyers can afford, especially middle- and lower-income Singaporeans who form the bulk of purchasers."

In the wake of property cooling measures that kicked in on Sept 30, analysts expect prices to moderate further in the last quarter of the year and fewer million-dollar deals to go through.

Sales will slow in the immediate term as buyers and sellers recalibrate their expectations following a lower loan-to-value (LTV) limit for HDB loans, said PropertyGuru Singapore country manager Tan Tee Khoon.

The property curbs had tightened the LTV for HDB loans from 85 per cent to 80 per cent, and introduced an interest rate floor of 3 per cent for HDB loan eligibility letter applications from Sept 30. Private home owners who wish to buy HDB resale flats are now subject to a 15-month wait after selling their homes.

However, Huttons Asia senior director of research Lee Sze Teck noted that prices of four-room flats may be pushed up as private property owners who are at least 55 years old can purchase a four-room or smaller resale flat without restrictions.

A total of 7,546 HDB resale flats changed hands in the third quarter of the year, up by 10.7 per cent from 6,819 in the previous quarter, reversing three quarters of declining transactions.

One Global Group senior analyst Mohan Sandrasegeran said this could be attributed to buyers seeing the fixed interest rates offered under HDB loans as a safe option.

"The booming HDB resale market likely led to more sellers having confidence to list their flats for sale, knowing that there is underlying demand that would result in hopeful buyers eventually picking up their units," he added.

Compared with the third quarter of 2021, when 8,433 resale flats were sold, resale transactions were 10.5 per cent lower.

The third quarter saw 11 HDB resale flats changing hands for at least $1 million, up from the 83 in the previous quarter.

Noting that this was the highest number of million-dollar flats transacted in a quarter, Dr Tan said private home downgraders turned to the HDB resale market because of high private property prices.

"These buyers are likely to turn towards non-mature estates, which are farther away from the city centre but more affordable than their city-fringe counterparts," he said.

Mr Lee added that the million-dollar transactions this year showed that buyers prioritise space, as the deals comprised more five-room and larger flats compared with those in 2021.

According to HDB data, executive apartments in Bishan were the most expensive in the third quarter, with a median price of $1,045,000. The median figure for the mature estate was not given in the previous quarter, as there were fewer than 20 transactions.

This was followed by Queenstown, where the median price of a five-room flat was $894,000, rising from $875,000 in the previous quarter. In the first quarter of this year, the median price of five-room flats in Queenstown had reached a peak of $952,000.

HDB data did not provide the third-quarter median resale price of five-room flats in the central area, which covers The Pinnacle@Duxton. But the median price of a four-room flat in the area fell from $964,000 in the second quarter to $680,000 in the third quarter.

Ms Sun said she expects the HDB resale market to continue to be attractive in the long term, even with the cooling measures.

In the HDB rental market, more flats were leased in the third quarter of this year, up slightly by 0.6 per cent to 56,372 units, compared with 56,014 in the previous quarter.

The number of approved applications to rent out HDB flats fell by 12 per cent to 8,192 cases in the third quarter of this year, from 9,309 in the previous quarter.

HDB said it will launch up to 23,000 Build-To-Order flats in 2023 and monitor housing demand to adjust plans as needed.

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Property analysts say that the slower price growth of the Housing Board resale market reflects economic conditions – buyers may be less willing to pay more for a home due to rising expenditure. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

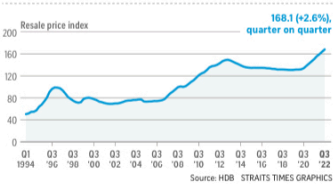
More HDB resale flats sold in Q3 2022

Quarter	One-room	Two-room	Three-room	Four-room	Five-room	Executive*	Total
Q3 2021	2	118	1,831	3,593	2,268	621	8,433
Q4 2021	0	114	1,785	3,347	2,085	609	7,940
Q1 2022	2	111	1,647	2,954	1,731	489	6,934
Q2 2022	4	111	1,558	2,909	1,762	475	6,819
Q3 2022	3	141	1,790	3,147	1,913	552	7,546

*Includes multi-generation flats.

Source: HDB STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

HDB resale prices rise for the 10th consecutive quarter



Source: HDB STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

Wage-price spiral risks low as firms exercise caution

Tay Hong Yi

The economy continues to thrive following the hit from Covid-19, but growing uncertainty globally has prompted employers to keep a lid on wages despite their need for workers in a tight labour market.

The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) released preliminary third-quarter labour data on Friday that showed 69.3 per cent of firms were looking to hire in the quarter ahead, slightly up from 69.1 per cent in June.

Demand in tourism- and consumer-related sectors is expected to remain robust, supported by the recovery of international visitor arrivals and year-end festive hiring, it said. But it added that trade-reliant sectors such as manufacturing may experience more subdued employment growth as global demand weakens.

There are also signs that businesses remain prudent about raising pay, reducing the risk of a wage-price spiral that could see higher salaries bid up the price of goods and drive up inflation in the process.

"For wage growth to be sustainable, wages should rise in tandem only with improvements in workers' productivity and skills," the MOM said.

The latest data shows 27.1 per cent of firms reported in September their intention to raise wages in the next quarter, a small decline of 0.5 percentage point from June.

This comes amid signs of a tight labour market, with data from the second quarter suggesting that there were more than 2.5 vacancies for each unemployed person.

"Companies may be anticipating weaker demand for their products and services due to the weakening of the global economy and are now taking a more cautious approach towards raising wages," said National University of Singapore labour economist Kelvin Seah.

MP Patrick Tay wrote on Facebook that MOM's comments on the low likelihood of a wage-price spiral could reassure the market that pay remains under control as firms chart a way through the global economic uncertainty.

The Russia-Ukraine war, rising US central bank interest rates and China's economic slowdown are some reasons behind a weakened global economy, said Dr Seah.

Dr David Leong, managing director of human resource consultancy PeopleWorldwide Consulting, said employers are cautious about unexpected shocks in the last two months of the year, and would rather hold off on hiring than raising wages.

"It is best to hold the reins and work with whatever is on hand instead of building up for anticipated growth; the growth prospect is dimmed with the circumstantial tensions all around," said Dr Leong.

Mr Nilay Khandelwal, managing director of talent consultancy Michael Page Singapore, said wage competition remains strong in the technology, biomedical and tourism sectors.

Nonetheless, he said his firm has seen employers jostling less for talent, with candidates usually receiving one to two offers in the third quarter, down from three to four in the second.

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Third-quarter labour estimates

The Ministry of Manpower released its Q3 preliminary labour estimates on Friday.

TOTAL EMPLOYMENT CHANGE



NOTE: Figures exclude foreign domestic workers.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES



QUARTERLY RETRENCHMENTS



*Preliminary

Source: MINISTRY OF MANPOWER STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

Suburban projects help fuel faster increase in Q3 private home prices

Grace Leong
Senior Business Correspondent

Private home prices in the third quarter grew at a faster pace of 3.8 per cent despite rising interest rates, as strong sales at new benchmark prices set by suburban launches fuelled price strength in the non-landed segment.

The price growth was higher than the Urban Redevelopment Authority's (URA) flash estimate of 3.4 per cent, and the 3.5 per cent gain in the second quarter.

Data released by URA on Friday showed that the increase in the overall private home price index for the 10th straight quarter was led by non-landed properties, whose prices rose by 4.4 per cent after a 3.6 per cent jump in the prior quarter.

Weaker sales of landed properties crimped this segment's price growth to 1.6 per cent in the third quarter, compared with a 2.9 per cent gain in the second quarter. But overall, for the first nine months of 2022, private home prices jumped 8.2 per cent, up from a 5.3 per cent gain in the same period in 2021.

By market segment, prices in the suburbs saw the biggest gain of 7.5 per cent – the steepest quarterly increase since third-quarter 2009 at 16.1 per cent – and up from a 2.1 per cent rise in the second quarter.

Three out of the five top condo sellers in the third quarter were in the suburbs, which benefited from pent-up demand amid a lack of new supply in recent years. AMO Residence, Lentor Modern and Sky Eden@Bedok had robust sales at benchmark prices averaging above $2,100 per sq ft (psf).

Prices in the prime district continued to recover, with a 2.3 per cent gain in the third quarter from the 1.9 per cent growth in the previous quarter. In the city fringe, price growth moderated to 2.8 per cent in the third quarter, from 6.4 per cent in the second quarter, due to a lack of fresh project launches.

Huttons Asia senior research director Lee Sze Teck attributed the price recovery in the prime district to stronger sales in the third quarter, as the price gap between this segment and the city fringe has narrowed.

"The estimated median psf of new homes in the city fringe stands at $2,431, 13.5 per cent lower than the median psf in the prime district," he said.

Developers are likely to pace their launches and recalibrate their marketing strategies as demand slows due to higher interest rates, property curbs and an expected economic slowdown, Cushman & Wakefield's head of research Wong Xian Yang said.

But this may not push developers to reduce future new launch prices because unsold inventory remains low at 15,777 units in the third quarter, versus a 10-year annual average of 26,953 units, while land acquisition and construction costs are high, he added.

He said developers have turned cautious despite low unsold stock.

"Since August, there haven't been major collective sale deals concluded. Recent GLS (Government Land Sales) tenders closed in September also fetched fewer bids than expected. These could signal a slowdown in developers' land acquisition activities amid concern over rising interest rates, inflationary pressure, construction costs and macroeconomic headwinds," Mr Wong said.

Ms Catherine He, director and head of research for Singapore at Colliers, said substantial new home supply in the coming months will further moderate price and rental growth.

During the third quarter, developers launched 1,455 uncompleted private homes (excluding executive condominiums, or ECs) for sale, down from 1,956 units in the previous quarter. They moved 2,187 private homes, down from 2,397 sold in the second quarter. In the third quarter, no EC units were launched and 28 were sold.

Rising interest rates and macroeconomic uncertainty also took their toll on resale volumes, which slipped to 3,719 units from 4,236 units in the previous quarter, said Ms Christine Sun, senior vice-president of research and analytics at OrangeTee & Tie.

URA data showed that private home rents climbed by 8.6 per cent in the third quarter from 6.7 per cent in the second quarter.

Over the past nine months, rents soared by 20.8 per cent due to delays in construction completions and an influx of residents and workers as border restrictions eased, said Mr Lam Chern Woon, head of research and consulting at Edmund Tie.

Ms Sun noted that tenants were signing longer leases of up to three years to secure units and lock in better rates, which will shrink rental volume. Also intensifying demand, private home owners buying unsubsidised Housing Board resale flats – who are affected by the 15-month wait-out period – may also rent, she added.

Rents were higher for both landed and non-landed properties. Rents for landed properties surged by 10.9 per cent, compared with a 3.2 per cent rise previously. Those for non-landed properties surged by 8.3 per cent, compared with a 7.1 per cent gain in the previous quarter.

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AT THE COURTS

Jail for man who gave false info in application to work here



In Yu Huajie's application for an Employment Pass, he falsely said he would be working for Gashubin Engineering as a regional marketing manager. He received up to $10,000 a month as "salary" even though he was never employed by the company. He has been given seven weeks' jail. ST PHOTO: KELVIN CHNG

He bought fake degree cert, pretended to work for company he invested $1 million in

Samuel Devaraj

Yu Huajie invested $1 million in a company in Singapore as he had hoped to eventually become a permanent resident (PR) so that he could set up companies and his children could live and study here.

In 2018, the Chinese national gave false information, including the company that he would be working at in Singapore, to the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) in his Employment Pass application.

The 37-year-old was given seven weeks' jail on Wednesday after he pleaded guilty to two charges under the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act.

MOM prosecuting officer Samuel Chua said in court documents that Yu believed an Employment Pass would help him gain permanent residency here.

While in China, he made inquiries on how he could settle down and legitimise his stay in Singapore, and approached a man who told him he could get an Employment Pass by investing $1 million in a company in Singapore.

Yu transferred the money to the man and also submitted, or caused the transfer of, his biodata, including a copy of his passport, to a Ms Wang Jue, the director of Hai Sin International, which purportedly helps clients buy over, invest in or start a business in Singapore.

Hai Sin had launched advertising campaigns in China on investing in Singapore.

MOM's Mr Chua said Yu knew that his Employment Pass would be applied under a company called Gashubin Engineering and his million-dollar investment would be for that company.

He also knew that he would be paid $10,000 a month as "monthly salary", on top of any future potential investment returns, and that he would not need to work for or on behalf of Gashubin.

Yu was later told that a degree certificate had to be submitted as part of his Employment Pass application. He agreed to getting a false certificate to show that he had graduated from The Chubb Institute (Westbury) in the United States with a bachelor's degree in business management.

He paid US$10,000 (S$14,000) for the fake certificate.

Yu applied for his Employment Pass on Dec 14, 2018, saying he would be working for Gashubin Engineering as a regional marketing manager, and on Feb 15, 2019, falsely declared to the controller of work passes in MOM that he would be working for the company and that he was a business management graduate of The Chubb Institute (Westbury).

Based on the declared information, MOM approved his application for an Employment Pass.

While in Singapore, Yu received between $5,000 and $10,000 a month from Gashubin as "salary" from Feb 15, 2019, to March 16, 2021, but was never employed by the company.

On March 16, 2021, an MOM employment inspector carried out investigations upon receiving information on possible contravention of laws related to the employment of foreigners.

Investigations revealed that in early to mid-2018, Ms Wang told the director of Gashubin that she could secure foreign investors for the company, provided that it applied for Employment Passes for these foreign investors to validate their stay in Singapore.

Ms Wang and the director agreed that these foreigners would only invest financially in Gashubin and would not need to work for or on its behalf.

Dr David Leong, managing director of human resource company PeopleWorldwide Consulting, said some PR applicants may exaggerate or present fake documents to improve their chances of approval.

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Former CCA teacher admits molesting 13 boys over three years

Jessie Lim

A former allied educator who was also the teacher-in-charge of a co-curricular activity (CCA) in a school admitted to molesting 13 boys over a span of three years.

He touched the boys' private parts and kissed them between 2015 and 2018. The victims were all members of the CCA and were 13 to 15 years old when the offences took place.

On Thursday, the man, 39, pleaded guilty to six charges. Twenty-three other charges were taken into consideration.

Details about the man, the victims and the school cannot be disclosed due to a gag order to protect the victims' identities.

The man also taught English and literature in the school. According to the Ministry of Education's (MOE) website, allied educators include school counsellors, student welfare officers and those whose job scopes also include teaching.

In late 2015, the man molested a 13-year-old boy at a chalet during a retreat for the CCA.

The boy had fallen asleep on a couch, but woke up to find himself on a bed and the man touching his private parts.

The man also committed an offence under the Children and Young Persons Act against the same boy in school between 2016 and 2017 by demanding that the youngster kiss him on the lips.

Deputy Public Prosecutors Lee Zu Zhao and Tan Hsiao Tien said the boy felt disgusted, but kept silent because he did not know how to react.

Feeling extremely stressed, the boy called the helpline of the Association of Women for Action and Research's sexual assault care centre and told them he had been molested by the man since Secondary 1.

However, when a case manager tried to contact the boy, he did not respond because he was afraid.

The CCA had a clubroom in the school.

While serving as teacher-in-charge, the man treated the room as his "personal staff room". The room was where most of the offences took place.

The blinds were always closed.

When he was in the room with the boys, the man would call the victims over to his desk to talk and touch them inappropriately. He would also go to the victims and touch them.

DPP Lee and Tan said: "The accused created an environment where inappropriate touching by him was normalised on the pretext of him acting affectionately in a brotherly or playful manner."

Although the man was not the only teacher-in-charge of the CCA, the other teachers rarely visited the clubroom.

Four others were molested in the room between 2017 and 2018.

The offences came to light after a CCA member told his mother in October 2018 that he had witnessed the teacher-in-charge touching and kissing some of his schoolmates. The woman lodged a police report the same month.

MOE said the man left the teaching service in November 2018. It said it will not hesitate to take disciplinary action against those who fail to adhere to its standards of conduct and discipline.

The man is expected to return to court for a pre-trial conference on Nov 29. District Judge Prem Raj ordered the man to undergo a psychiatric assessment.

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S'porean gets death penalty for trafficking heroin

Selina Lum
Senior Law Correspondent

A 31-year-old man who was found with 25 packets of heroin in his bedroom in November 2018 was given the mandatory death penalty on Thursday for drug trafficking.

Shen Hanjie, a Singaporean, was charged with trafficking more than 2.65kg of a granular and powdery substance that was found to contain 34.94g of pure heroin after analysis. The law provides for the death penalty if the amount of heroin trafficked exceeds 15g.

During his trial in 2021, Shen claimed at first that he thought the drugs were cannabis and that he was merely safekeeping them for an acquaintance named "Alan" whom he had met only once in person.

In May this year, High Court judge Dedar Singh Gill convicted Shen, rejecting his claim that he believed that the packets contained cannabis.

In his statements to investigators after his arrest, Shen contended that he never opened the packets, never looked at the drugs, never asked Alan what was inside, and knew nothing about the specific nature of their contents.

But this position evolved during his trial, when Shen claimed he had looked at the drugs and asked Alan what they were, to which Alan replied they were "ganja" – a common name for cannabis.

"This marked shift in the accused's evidence and the absence of any credible explanation for this change show the accused's lack of credit and renders his belated assertion at trial unbelievable," said Justice Gill.

The judge similarly rejected the safekeeping defence, which he said was "inherently unbelievable". Shen had consistently admitted in his statements that Alan sent drugs to him so that he could deliver them to others. Two notebooks found in Shen's room contained names of 18 people to whom he had previously passed drugs.

Justice Gill noted that on Shen's own testimony, Alan had called him out of the blue six months after their first and only meeting to ask if he could keep his things at the accused's place.

"What is baffling is that even after the accused found out that Alan had been sending him illicit drugs for storage, the accused continued to 'help' Alan, someone whom he barely knew... without any protest and for no payment, notwithstanding that he was facing substantial financial difficulties," said the judge.

He noted that Shen, who was unemployed at the time of his arrest, had to fund his daily consumption of Ice as well as his gambling habit.

Shen stopped helping out at his father's coffee shop two years ago and had no other source of income apart from the allowance his parents gave him. His financial woes even led him to pawn his and his parents' items.

The judge found that the prosecution had proven beyond reasonable doubt that Shen had the drugs in his possession for the purposes of trafficking.

On Thursday, giving his decision on the sentence, Justice Gill said Shen did not qualify for life imprisonment, which is available to drug couriers who meet specific requirements.

The judge found that Shen was not a mere courier; neither was he certified by the prosecution to have substantively assisted the Central Narcotics Bureau in disrupting drug trafficking, nor suffering from a mental disorder or intellectual disability that impaired his responsibility for his acts.

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Lorry driver under probe over seven-hour jam at KPE entrance

David Sun
Crime Correspondent

The police are investigating a lorry driver who allegedly caused a massive seven-hour jam at the Nicoll Highway entrance to Kallang-Paya Lebar Expressway (KPE) on Monday after several heavy metal plates fell from his vehicle.

The driver's alleged failure to secure the metal plates is believed to be the focus of the investigation.

The Land Transport Authority (LTA) said it was alerted at about 4.45pm to the incident at the entrance of the KPE tunnel in the direction of Tampines Expressway.

An LTA spokesman said vehicle recovery services and traffic marshals who were deployed to the scene to investigate found several heavy metal plates on the slip road leading to the entrance, rendering it impassable.

She said the slip road was immediately closed and vehicles were guided out of the incident site.

"Preliminary assessment was that the metal plates could have fallen off from a lorry, and this was confirmed when the driver of the lorry subsequently returned to the incident site with lifting equipment to retrieve the metal plates."

The spokesman added that the fallen metal plates damaged the surface of the road and, as a result, the LTA had to carry out roadworks and resurface parts of the road.

Videos shared online showed a long line of vehicles in a jam in the slip road on Monday afternoon.

Some of the vehicles were seen going against the flow of traffic as they were directed away from the incident site.

There have been no reported injuries from the incident.

The slip road was reopened to traffic at around 12.10am on Tuesday, after the roadworks were completed.

The LTA spokesman said the authority would like to take the opportunity to remind drivers of goods vehicles to check that their loads are properly secured before moving off, to ensure the safety of all road users.

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The lorry driver allegedly caused a massive jam at the Nicoll Highway entrance to Kallang-Paya Lebar Expressway on Monday after several heavy metal plates fell from his vehicle. His alleged failure to secure the metal plates is believed to be the focus of the police investigation. PHOTO: YUSRI MOHD/FACEBOOK



2022年9月21日 星期三 联合早报 zaobaosg

专家谈最近裁员现象

本地科技领域人力资源仍供不应求

新加坡人力资源协会主席刘碧琴认为，科技业目前面临周期性变化，但这个阶段终究会过去。一些企业在此时裁员，似乎显得目光短浅，而且导致公司声誉受损。

陈紫筠 报道
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一些科技公司最近传出裁员消息，但人力资源专家指出，本地科技业没有出现大规模裁员现象，这个领域整体依旧面对人力供不应求的情况。

冬海集团（Sea Group）旗下电商平台虾皮（Shopee）和送餐业者foodpanda近日在本地裁员，它们都表示这是优化运营效率和降低成本的部分举措。市场人士指出，受影响的主要是科技平台业者，金融科技和Web3.0等其他科技领域对人才的需求仍非常高。

新加坡人力资源协会主席刘碧琴认为，科技业目前正面临周期性变化，但这个阶段终究会过去。一些企业在这个时候裁员，似乎显得目光短浅，而且导致公司声誉受损。

她接受《联合早报》访问时说："以网络安全和资讯科技领域来看，求职者找工作不是问题。一些公司如Lazada和亚马逊，或是公共服务机构如政府科技局（GovTech）都在聘请这类人才。"

她说，入门级工程师的薪水从四五千元起跳，仍相当具吸引力。

据了解，虾皮在星期一新一轮裁退的员工比率是低个位数，他们主要来自人力资源、区域运营、营销、产品和工程部门。至于foodpanda，科技新闻媒体DealStreetAsia引述消息人士称，驻新加坡的区域团队有5%的员工被裁。

人力资源公司仁立国际执行董事梁昌国博士指出，经营平台业务的科技企业如Grab、虾皮和foodpanda面对较大的裁员风险，因为它们旗下平台的使用率在下降。

不过，受访人力资源专家指出，科技专才不太可能长期失业，因为市场需求非常高。由于银行、金融科技和其他具潜能行业正在崛起，科技专才的薪水不太可能看跌。

虾皮裁员的消息传出后，新加坡数字产业发展司（DISG）在星期一向媒体表达了政府对我国科技业长期增长潜力的信心。

新加坡数字产业发展司司长陈逸明星期二受询时进一步说："尽管目前通胀和利率上升等宏观条件让投资者变得谨慎，本区域的数码化和数码消费前景正面，长远来说，私募股权或创投资本领域预计保持活力。"

数字产业发展司是由经济发展局、资讯通信媒体发展局和新加坡企业发展局联合组成，负责推动本地数码产业的发展。

涵盖大型科技跨国企业和起步公司的信息与通讯业是我国数码经济发展的主要驱动力。这个领域在2021年取得12%增长，目前占国内生产总值的5.6%。

人力资源公司德科集团新加坡经理贝杜尔根奇（Betul Genc）也认为，整体科技业应该不会受到裁员行动影响，今年至今几个季度的招聘需求增加了20%，这个趋势预料会延续下去。

跨国招聘公司华德士新加坡（Robert Walters Singapore）科技与转型顾问巴瓦尼（Vanisha Bharwani）指出，科技业的流动非常大，招聘需求一直都存在，年底时可能放慢步伐，但相信明年会继续加紧请人。

此外，一些企业继续通过提高薪金来争取优良人才，尤其是在通胀高涨的情况下，薪酬是吸引人才的显著因素。

Robust hiring seen in travel-linked sectors as virus curbs ease

Resignation rates hold steady in sign of firms not just recruiting but also retaining workers

Tay Hong Yi

As global travel resumes, domestic Covid-19 curbs ease and demand for consumer-facing services rises here, more people are being hired in the aviation, food and beverage, and accommodation sectors.

Figures by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) for the second quarter of this year show a robust hiring rate for production and transport operators, cleaners and labourers in air transport and related services, averaging 11.6 per cent for the three months – the highest among all sectors tracked.

This comes as major aviation employers ramped up hiring to deal with a faster-than-expected rebound of flight volume after border restrictions eased in April.

Even as overall recruitment rates in the second quarter rose to a level last seen in 2014, resignation rates for all sectors held steady – indicating that employers are retaining workers, not just taking them on.

"Tourism- and aviation-related sectors are expected to continue to benefit from the strong recovery in air passengers and international visitor arrivals," MOM said in a statement on Wednesday.

The overall monthly recruitment rate for air transport and its supporting services averaged 3.6 per cent in the second quarter, a sharp rise over the 0.8 per cent from the same period last year.

Despite the hiring spree, the vacancy rate for production and transport operators, cleaners and labourers in the sector remains high, at over 17 per cent, comparable to the figure for such workers in the accommodation sector.

Meanwhile, the average monthly recruitment rate for the accommodation sector in the second quarter was 4.7 per cent, with the resignation rate averaging 3.6 per cent.

The overall vacancy rate for the sector, at 11.1 per cent, is the highest among all the sectors MOM tracks, as at June.

The average monthly resignation rate for professionals, managers, executives and technicians in accommodation – 3.6 per cent – eclipsed the 3.4 per cent hiring rate over the second quarter, unlike any other sector.

Across all sectors, seasonally adjusted, the resignation rate held steady at 1.7 per cent for the fourth consecutive quarter, while the recruitment rate rose to 2.6 per cent – a rate last seen in 2014.

Taken together, these rates suggest employers have been able to bring in and retain their workers, providing relief to manpower shortages, said MOM.

But Permanent Secretary for Manpower Ng Chee Khern told reporters on Wednesday that Singapore's high labour force participation rate of over 70 per cent means there is a limit to how many more Singaporeans and permanent residents can be "pushed back into the workforce".

Nonetheless, he said, the ministry is trying to increase labour force participation via initiatives such as flexible working arrangements that appeal to untapped segments such as caregivers.

And there is room for non-resident employment to continue growing, with some sectors well short of pre-pandemic levels.

For instance, non-resident employment is about 20 per cent below pre-pandemic levels in food and beverage, with the shortfall rising to around 40 per cent for accommodation, noted Mr Ng.

Despite the continued rebound in non-resident employment expected, the Government is also encouraging businesses to transform with automation, said Mr Kenny Tan, divisional director of MOM's manpower planning and policy division.

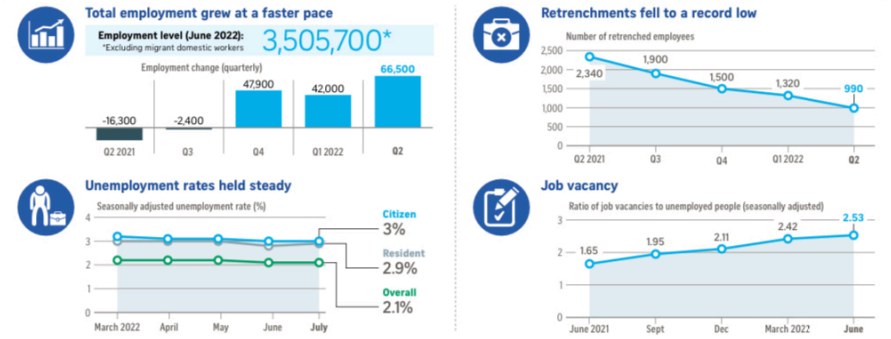
Dr David Leong, managing director of PeopleWorldwide Consulting, said the high turnover could have arisen from a preference for hybrid or work-from-home arrangements less prevalent in these front-line, customer-facing roles.

"Business continuity and productivity are severely impacted (and) human resources (departments have) to recalibrate work to prepare for such job seekers seeking a balance of needs," he said.

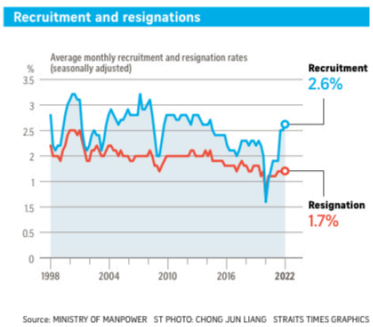
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Q2 labour stats: Employment up, retrenchment down

Employment almost back at pre-pandemic levels







Source: MINISTRY OF MANPOWER ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

No major disruption to Singapore's rice imports from India's levy move

Gabrielle Chan

There has been no significant disruption to Singapore's rice imports from India, while rice imports from countries such as Vietnam and Thailand are still healthy.

Also, the nation's Rice Stockpile Scheme has helped it mitigate the impact of any supply disruptions or price fluctuations, said the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI).

India recently imposed a 20 per cent levy on exports of key varieties such as unmilled and husk brown rice, and banned the export of broken rice, whose consumption here is low, MTI said.

The ministry added that the Government will continue to monitor the situation and ensure that Singapore has a sufficient supply of rice.

Singapore imported US$59.8 million (S$84 million) of rice from India in 2020, compared with US$57.3 million of rice from Vietnam and US$123 million from Thailand in the same year, according to the Observatory of Economic Complexity.

Importers under the Rice Stockpile Scheme need to have an inventory buffer equivalent to two times their average monthly imports, according to a written parliamentary reply by Trade and Industry Minister Gan Kim Yong in July.

This helps to stabilise the supply and prices of rice during periods of uncertainty and supply shortages.

Supermarket chain Sheng Siong has said that it will not increase the prices of house brand rice in the short term, while FairPrice said its prices have remained stable.

But other businesses are set to increase their prices.

Mustafa Centre, which sources most of its rice products from India, will raise prices of affected products by 20 per cent after its next shipment arrives.

Its purchasing manager Mohd Saleem did not give a date for this shipment.

"There is no issue with the supply of rice, only the prices will be affected," he said.

Mr V. Rama Murthy of Chennai Trading and Supermarket said his regular customers, mostly caterers for migrant workers, are now hesitant to buy from him.

He has hiked the prices of all types of rice, except basmati, by $5 for a 25kg bag from Wednesday.

"Customers are confused and upset at the uncertain situation, and are hesitant to buy in bulk now due to the increase in prices," he said.

Conversely, Catering Solutions – which uses five tonnes of rice daily in its meals for foreign workers – aims to increase its prices gradually, said director S. Mahenthiran.

"Prices tend to go up during certain seasons, and fall during other seasons. But this time round, it is a bit different. Prices have remained high," he said.

"Furthermore, the Indian government introduced an export tax on rice, which took effect on Sept 9. This has further inflated the price of rice," he added.

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$84m

Value of rice Singapore imported from India in 2020.

20%

Percentage by which Mustafa Centre, which sources most of its rice products from India, intends to raise the prices of affected products after its next shipment arrives.

Luxury goods scam

6 civil cases filed to recover $6.7m paid for Rolex watches, other items

Selina Lum
Senior Law Correspondent

Six civil cases have been filed by customers of Tradenation and Tradeluxury to get back the money they paid for luxury goods – mostly Rolex watches – that were never delivered.

The claimants in the six cases – three were filed in the High Court, two in the State Courts and one in the Small Claims Tribunals – are seeking to recover more than $6.7 million in total.

Since June, over 180 police reports have been lodged against the two companies over undelivered luxury goods worth $32 million.

The couple who ran the business, Singaporean Pi Jiapeng and his Thai wife, Pansuk Siriwipa, both 27, fled Singapore on July 4.

They were arrested by Malaysian police at a budget hotel in Johor Bahru and handed over to Singapore police on Aug 11.



Pi Jiapeng and his wife Pansuk Siriwipa were each handed two charges for cheating and one for leaving Singapore illegally.

They were each given two charges for cheating and one for leaving Singapore illegally, and have remained in custody.

A check of court records showed that three civil cases, claiming between $419,005 and $3.48 million, were filed between July 6 and July 18 in the High Court.

Two cases, one claiming $187,000 and the other $78,000, were filed against Tradenation on June 21 and July 5, respectively, in the State Courts.

A case has also been filed against Tradeluxury in the Small Claims Tribunals, which typically hears for claim sums of up to $20,000. No further information was available.

Pi was a director and shareholder of Tradenation and Tradeluxury, while Pansuk was a shareholder of Tradenation from May 28 last year to March 25, according to court documents.

Lawyers Mohamed Ibrahim Mohamed Yakub and Low Shi Hou of law firm Achievers are acting for six people who obtained default judgment in two High Court cases.

Mr Ibrahim said his clients have obtained Mareva injunctions to freeze the defendants' assets, which include a Chevrolet Corvette and a McLaren 720S coupe.

Two of the clients, Mr Lee Jinhe and Mr Swoo Guo Zhong, sued Tradenation, Tradeluxury and Pi for breach of contract for failing to deliver eight Rolex watches.

They are seeking a refund of the $419,005 they paid between Feb 8 and May 20.

The other four, Mr Jackson Chng Zhun Teck, Mr Lee Boon Ping, Ms Chang Khang Lee and Mr Hermen Tan Jen Sen, sued for breach of contract over the failure to deliver 40 Rolex watches, a Patek Philippe watch and four Hermes bags.

They are seeking the return of $2.1 million – from the couple and the two companies – that they paid between Jan 31 and May 17. Mr Chng is seeking a further $472,500 for seven Rolex watches he had consigned to Tradenation for resale.

The $3.48 million claim was filed by a company called Jluxury against Tradenation, Tradeluxury, Pi and Pansuk. According to court documents, Jluxury bought watches from the defendants, who offered "very attractive" prices, for the purpose of reselling them.

The company is seeking to recover $2.98 million paid for 73 Rolex watches it agreed to buy from Tradenation and Tradeluxury between March 19 and May 30. It is also seeking loss of profit totalling $507,400.

Lawyer Goh Hui Hua of Covenant Chambers is representing Mr Thomas Tong Guo Xian, who has obtained default judgment in his claim for the return of $78,000 he paid for two Rolex watches on April 23.

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THE STRAITS TIMES
STOP SCAMS
The number of scams reported in Singapore has risen sharply over the years.
THE STRAITS TIMES has launched a STOP SCAMS initiative to create awareness and alert people to how they can protect themselves.
For more on scams, go to: str.sg/stopscams

5-12% pay hike for admin officers, judicial and statutory appointment holders

Zhaki Abdullah

The salaries of administrative service officers, as well as judicial and selected statutory appointment holders, will be adjusted by between 5 per cent and 12 per cent from Oct 1, the Public Service Division (PSD) said on Monday.

Their salary ranges will also be adjusted, PSD added.

It follows the announcement in June that about 23,000 civil servants would receive salary increases of between 5 per cent and 14 per cent from Aug 1.

PSD said about 300 administrative officers and 30 judicial and statutory appointment holders will benefit from the current revision.

They include the Chief Justice, judges of the Court of Appeal, the Attorney-General, Public Service Commission chairman and Auditor-General.

Salaries for these positions were last adjusted almost 15 years ago. Since then, gaps with market benchmarks have increased significantly, PSD said.

"These adjustments will enable the public service to continue to attract and retain its fair share of talent for key leadership roles," it said.

It added that it would continue to periodically review the salaries of public officers and adjust them when necessary to "broadly keep pace with, but not lead, the market".

The last such adjustment in 2007 saw administrative officers, and political, judicial and statutory appointment holders getting pay increases of between 4 per cent and 21 per cent.

Dr David Leong, managing director of human resources firm PeopleWorldwide Consulting, said larger law firms have been raising their offers to attract and retain young lawyers as a way of countering trends such as high burnout among the legal fraternity.

"The public service, in a way, has to compete with private practices for talent," he said, adding that there is also a need to mitigate inflationary pressures.

The salary adjustment is long overdue, said Mr Adrian Choo, founder of career consulting company Career Agility International.

Noting that a record 538 lawyers left the profession last year, he said law firms could be looking to hire.

Mr Choo added that with the labour market improving after more than two years of the Covid-19 pandemic, the public service has seen an exodus of talent to the private sector.

In February, Minister-in-charge of the Public Service Chan Chun Sing said in Parliament that the public sector had seen an increase in attrition across the board.

Last year, the turnover rate for the public service's management executive scheme reached a 10-year peak of 9.9 per cent.

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Shoppers at the FairPrice Finest outlet in Junction 8 mall. MPs have been asking periodically if the GST hike can be delayed, as living costs rise amid global inflationary pressures. Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong reiterated that Singapore's spending needs are growing, largely driven by higher healthcare expenditure as the population ages. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

GST hike to go ahead as planned with support measures in place

DPM Wong: Govt committed to helping families offset increase and will enhance aid if necessary

Tham Yuen-C
Senior Political Correspondent

The goods and services tax (GST) will increase as planned from next year even amid a sharp rise in tax revenue of more than 22 per cent, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Lawrence Wong said on Monday.

This is because the higher revenue stemmed mostly from higher-than-expected stamp duty takings, which can fluctuate from year to year and is therefore not a sustainable source of revenue, he explained.

The Government is committed to offsetting the GST increase even amid inflation, and the majority of households will not feel the impact of the tax increase for at least five years, while lower-income households will not feel it for 10 years, he stressed.

"We will uphold this commitment even with the higher inflationary outlook and will further enhance the Assurance Package if necessary," he said, referring to the $6.6 billion package to offset additional GST expenses.

Mr Wong was responding to Ms Foo Mee Har (West Coast GRC), Mr Yip Hon Weng (Yio Chu Kang) and Workers' Party MP Jamus Lim (Sengkang GRC), who asked if there were plans to defer the GST increase given growing inflation and the increase in tax revenue in financial year 2021.

GST will be raised by 2 percentage points in two stages, from 7 per cent to 8 per cent on Jan 1 next year, and to 9 per cent on Jan 1, 2024.

MPs have been asking periodically if the hike can be delayed, as living costs rise amid global inflationary pressures.



NOT SUSTAINABLE REVENUE

Just as a bullish property market can provide upsides, there can also be downsides in a muted market... We therefore cannot rely on such sentiment-driven collections, which can fluctuate from year to year, as a stable and sustainable source of revenue.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND FINANCE MINISTER LAWRENCE WONG, on higher-than-expected revenue from stamp duty.

On Monday, Mr Wong noted that the 22.4 per cent increase in tax revenue for the 2021 financial year was partly due to a lower tax base in the previous financial year arising from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The collection of "sentiment-based" revenue was also higher than expected, with stamp duty accounting for the lion's share of the increase as the property market recovered at a much faster rate than market observers had anticipated, he said.

He added that the higher revenue collected had been used to fund spending such as enhancements to the Progressive Wage Credit Scheme – which offsets mandatory wage increases for lower-wage workers – and to provide short-term relief for businesses and families through Covid-19 support packages, among others.

Cautioning against using such revenue to fund recurrent spending, he said: "Just as a bullish property market can provide upsides, there can also be downsides in a muted market, as past experience has shown.

"We therefore cannot rely on such sentiment-driven collections, which can fluctuate from year to year, as a stable and sustainable source of revenue to meet our rising recurrent expenditure needs."

Asked by Mr Yip if there was a better way to project tax revenue in the future so that fiscal policies can be tuned more finely, Mr Wong said market observers never expected the property market to rally as strongly as it did.

This underscores the difficulty in predicting revenue items based on asset prices, which are often volatile, he added.

There will always be a high degree of uncertainty in predicting Singapore's revenue, given that the economy is small and open and subject to external demand fluctuations, he said.

Mr Wong reiterated that spending needs are growing, largely driven by higher healthcare expenditure as the population ages.

There is also a need to accelerate Singapore's economic and green transformation, and shore up resilience in food and energy amid global economic uncertainty, he said.

Referring to higher taxes on wealth announced at Budget 2022 and the GST hike, he said: "These will provide us with the resources we need to meet our longer-term priorities in a responsible manner. We will proceed with these measures, including the GST increase, as planned."

Asked by Ms Foo about projections for the 2022 financial year, Mr Wong said it was still too early to tell as revenue and expenditure fluctuate from month to month.

"Our aim is not to accumulate a surplus. Let's be very clear about this. Our aim is to run a balanced budget over the medium term. That is our consistent fiscal policy," he added.

Associate Professor Lim asked if the Ministry of Finance had done any studies on the impact of inflation on real wage growth on different segments of the population.

To this, Mr Wong said the Government was closely monitoring how inflation is impacting income growth of the different segments of society, taking into consideration the various support packages such as Workfare income supplements.

"We fully understand that higher inflation disproportionately impacts the lower-income groups, which is why our measures have already taken that into consideration," he said, adding that government support packages tilt heavily towards lower-income households.

In June, the Government announced a $1.5 billion support package to help lower-income families and vulnerable groups cope with rising costs.

Mr Wong added on Monday that if some groups still face difficulties coping with higher inflation despite these support measures, the Government will "certainly consider doing more to help these families cope through these challenging times".

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Fire extinguishers to be placed at lift lobbies of 1 in 2 HDB blocks

Shermaine Ang

Fire extinguishers will be placed at the lift lobbies of one in every two Housing Board blocks for residents to use in the event of a fire.

The initiative is a trial by the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF), HDB, town councils and Temasek Foundation, Minister of State for Home Affairs Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim said in Parliament on Monday.

Ms Rachel Ong (West Coast GRC) had asked if the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) would consider placing fire extinguishers along the common corridors of each HDB block, and about efforts to educate residents on their use.

Her questions came after two fires in flats last month that involved hoarding. A man died in one incident.

In response, Associate Professor Faishal said the SCDF has been educating residents on how to use fire extinguishers through schemes such as the Community Emergency Preparedness Programme and Community Resilience Days, which are sessions organised to impart fire safety and other skills to the public.

The SCDF also encourages residents to install fire extinguishers in their homes, and informs them where hose reels are located in common areas, he added.

In response to queries, the SCDF said the fire extinguishers will be placed at HDB blocks that have an automated external defibrillator installed.

Discussions with stakeholders on the trial are ongoing. More details will be shared when ready, it said.

Ms Ong and Mr Zhulkarnain Abdul Rahim (Chua Chu Kang GRC) asked for updates on the free installation of home fire alarm devices in public rental flats, and whether MHA will consider installing these automatic smoke detectors in all lower-income households and in flats with seniors.

Prof Faishal said fire alarms have been installed in 75 per cent of all public rental flats under the scheme, and the HDB will progressively install the devices in the remaining 25 per cent of rental flats after tenants move out.

He added that the Government currently does not intend to expand the scheme, as the number of fires in HDB estates each year has continued to decrease and deaths from fires remain low.

Responding to Ms Foo Mee Har (West Coast GRC) on whether fire safety standards will be reviewed, he said the SCDF regularly reviews the Fire Code together with other stakeholders.

The SCDF said the Fire Code was last reviewed in 2018, and the next review will be completed at the end of next year.

In a separate written reply to Ms Ong, Home Affairs and Law Minister K. Shanmugam said there were 4,535 fires in HDB units from January 2018 to last month.

The main causes of the fires were unattended cooking, indiscriminate disposal of lighted materials such as cigarette butts, and faulty electrical appliances, he said.

There were signs of hoarding in 15 of the fires, two of which occurred in public rental flats, he added.

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High-fliers' work pass could also help retain local talent: Experts

They would feel assured that they have peers from overseas they can stand toe to toe with

Tay Hong Yi

The slew of changes to Singapore's work pass framework for foreign professionals announced on Monday is expected to position the Republic as a prime destination for top talent.

The new five-year work pass for these high-fliers, which headlined the changes unveiled by Minister for Manpower Tan See Leng, could also help retain top homegrown talent by assuring them that they have peers from overseas they can stand toe to toe with, labour experts told The Straits Times.

The Overseas Networks and Expertise Pass targets top talent in all sectors who earn a fixed monthly salary of at least $30,000, or have a track record of outstanding achievements in various fields such as academia or the arts.

"(Such a pass) builds a community of top talent so (home-grown talent) don't have to go overseas to find peers to learn from and exchange their knowledge with," said Dr Faizal Yahya from the Institute of Policy Studies.

Such talent are likely extremely seasoned experts who do not wish to be tied to a single organisation but who can pass on valuable knowledge to local talent, said Dr David Leong, managing director of human resource advisory firm PeopleWorldwide Consulting.

He added that robotics, artificial intelligence, cyber security, biotechnology and finance are sectors likely to attract talent under the new pass.

Ms Evelyn Chow, managing director of strategic human resources consultancy DecodeHR, said Singapore's top talent likely have overseas networks from their studies or work.

These networks could also include talent who qualify for the new pass. Singaporeans could spread word of the pass or even invite them over for collaboration, Ms Chow said.

The new pass was unveiled at a time when schemes to attract and retain top foreign talent are being introduced elsewhere, such as in Germany and the United Kingdom.

But Ms Chow noted that different countries target different segments of talent based on their needs.

"The UK is focusing on recent graduates, perhaps because it is not retaining the same rate of foreign graduates that it used to," she said, comparing Singapore's new pass with the UK's High Potential Individual visa scheme introduced in May.

"Asia is already extremely attractive for young graduates... (so) Singapore does not need a similar scheme for high-potential young foreign talent," said Ms Chow.

In Singapore, "the Government is really pushing for... the kind of established top talent to meet the needs of the organisations they are trying to attract to establish their headquarters here", she added.

Although a potential draw for talent, the new pass also poses challenges for employers.

Ms Low Peck Kem, president of Singapore Human Resources Institute, said: "With higher perceived stability of a five-year term instead of two years, pass holders would also be more committed to relocate their dependants.

"With such big moves, there is also less flexibility for companies to change the employment contract."

She added: "With easier recruitment of foreign talent, local talent may perceive it as less opportunities for them for the top jobs."

Other changes announced on Monday include a shorter Employment Pass (EP) processing time, with a response promised within 10 business days, a shortening of the Fair Consideration Framework job advertising requirement to 14 days from 28 days, and a longer five-year EP for occupations in areas where there is a shortage of skills, compared with two to three years before.

Also announced was a unified salary benchmark pegged to the top 10 per cent of EP holders – now set at $22,500 a month – for exemption from the Fair Consideration Framework job advertising requirement and points-based Complementarity Assessment Framework.

The new benchmark will also apply to those applying for a personalised EP.

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Second Minister for Law Edwin Tong having a fireside chat at the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law Academy event yesterday. The session was moderated by Global Arbitration Review editor-at-large and chief correspondent Alison Ross. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

S'pore can play key role in resolving cross-border disputes: Edwin Tong

Wong Shiying

With Asean on track to become the fourth largest economy in the world by 2030, there will likely be more cross-border disputes between businesses in the region, said Second Minister for Law Edwin Tong yesterday.

And Singapore, with its strong legal system and infrastructure, can play a central role in resolving these disputes, added Mr Tong, who is also Minister for Culture, Community and Youth.

Speaking at a fireside chat at the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law Academy (Uncitral) – a three-day event headlining the Singapore Convention Week – he noted that a record level of foreign direct investments flowed into Asia last year, and as these investments mature, disputes are expected to arise.

Mr Tong added: "We've seen many large businesses come (to Singapore) and try to resolve disputes because their relationship goes back many years, if not decades.

"For large infrastructure projects, we tend to end up with the same contractors and subcontractors – specialists in the area – and it will do them well to try and preserve that relationship as far as they can."

Through mediation, parties in a cross-border dispute can attempt to negotiate a new deal, facilitated by a neutral third-party mediator, to salvage a commercial relationship which would otherwise disintegrate if the litigation or arbitration routes were taken.

Minister for Law and Home Affairs K. Shanmugam, who gave a speech at the conference, said that with rising geopolitical tensions and supply chain disruptions, there is an even greater need for a good dispute resolution framework.

In this context, the Singapore Convention on Mediation plays an even more important role, he said. The multilateral treaty came into force in September 2020.

A total of 55 countries have signed and 10 have ratified the convention, which makes it easier for mediated agreements to be enforced in acceding countries.

Without the treaty, a settlement agreement made in one country may have no legal force in another, and parties would have to go to court to have it enforced.

Mr Shanmugam noted that the Russia-Ukraine war and the Covid-19 pandemic have made a deep impact on businesses around the world.

"We're looking at slow growth and high inflation. According to the International Monetary Fund in July, global growth this year (3.2 per cent) would probably be half of what it was last year (6.1 per cent)," he said.

"At the same time, there have been supply constraints because production capacity is not yet fully back to pre-pandemic levels," he added.

"With geopolitical tensions between the United States and China, many countries are placing greater emphasis on resilience to withstand external shocks and this often means turning inwards."

Mr Shanmugam said: "It is a very uncertain environment, globalisation as we knew it has obviously suffered a setback.

"Countries have to work even harder to try and come together, to keep to what is possible in terms of cooperation, and keep the global trading environment as healthy as possible."

Mr Shanmugam called for more countries to come on board the Singapore Convention on Mediation, since the effectiveness of the convention depends on how many parties ratify it.

"(Mediation) is relatively faster, cheaper, more flexible and helps to preserve business relationships, which is probably even more important in today's fractured landscape," he said.

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400 RSAF men take part in Exercise Pitch Black with 16 other air forces

Aqil Hamzah

The skills of more than 400 Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) airmen are being put to the test in a large-scale, multinational air combat exercise in northern Australia.

Exercise Pitch Black, being held from Aug 19 to Sept 8 in Darwin, features the greatest number of participating countries – 17 – since its inception in 1981, with about 2,500 people and 100 aircraft involved.

RSAF exercise director Mark Tan said in a media briefing that 18 Singapore planes are being deployed, including the A330 Multi-Role Tanker Transport that will make its debut in the biennial exercise.

The other RSAF aircraft consist of F-15SG and F-16D+ fighter jets, numbering eight each, and a Gulfstream 550 airborne early warning aircraft.

The total number of personnel and aircraft means Singapore has one of the largest representations at the exercise, said Colonel Tan, 44, who described it as "essential for sharpening our operational competencies".

He added: "This exercise provides the RSAF with an excellent opportunity to conduct large-scale realistic air combat training in both day and night conditions.

"It allows us to share best practices with our foreign counterparts and lets us benchmark our capabilities with established air forces."

The airmen, who comprise operationally ready national servicemen, full-time national servicemen and RSAF regulars from different squadrons, were put through their paces to ensure they were ready.

These included overseas deployments, physical training, live flights at the South China Sea training airspace and simulator training to replicate missions they would undergo in Australia.

Col Tan noted that it is the first time the F-35 Joint Strike Fighters are being deployed by the Royal Australian Air Force and United States Marine Corps, which provide his airmen with a better understanding of their capabilities, before the eventual delivery of four F-35B fighter jets in 2026.

Singapore has been part of the exercise since 1990, with this year's iteration marking the 18th time that the RSAF has participated.

The air forces involved this time round are from Australia, Canada, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates, Britain and the US.

The exercise is seen by the countries as a chance to learn from one another and improve their force integration using one of the largest training airspace areas in the world.

During the exercise, aerial assets from the participating nations conduct a variety of missions as they engage in air combat against simulated threats found in modern battlefields.

The missions will be conducted during the day and night and incorporate offensive and defensive elements.



Above: Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) ground crew on the flight line at Royal Australian Air Force's Base Darwin during Exercise Pitch Black. Top: RSAF fighter jets flying in formation between Australia's EA-18G Growlers (below in picture) and Japan's F-2 planes during the exercise. PHOTOS: MINDEF

It is the realistic training that F-15SG pilot Arumugam Sivaraj, 36 – who also took part in the exercise in 2012 and 2014 – relishes the most.

"Compared with the previous times I participated, the number of nations taking part this year has increased significantly, and the types of aircraft used have varied over time.

"This year is the first time a fifth-generation fighter jet is being introduced in the exercise, with different capabilities and limitations," said Major Sivaraj.

He added: "The type of integration has changed over the years, which brings about different challenges and takeaways."

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SIVADAS-HEB EDUCATION FUND BURSARIES FOR 2022

The Sivadas-HEB Education Fund invites Hindu students from low-income families pursuing tertiary education to apply for financial assistance to help them meet the cost of their education. Students can apply for either a Tuition Subsidy or an Education Grant.

Tuition Subsidy

A tuition subsidy is for students enrolled in a Singapore registered Private Education Institution (PEI) approved by the Committee for Private Education (CPE) and pursuing a course leading to a first diploma or a first degree conferred by well-established universities and institutions. Applicants for the Tuition Subsidy must be enrolled in a PEI that has been awarded the EduTrust Star or EduTrust (4 year award) by the CPE.

Education Grant

An Education Grant is for students pursuing:

- a first undergraduate degree in NUS, NTU, SMU, SUTD, SIT or SUSS
- a first diploma in Nanyang Polytechnic, Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Republic Polytechnic, Singapore Polytechnic or Temasek Polytechnic
- a publicly funded diploma or degree programme in LASALLE College of the Arts or the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts
- a course in any of the Ministry of Education's Institutes of Technical Education (ITE)

Criteria

All applicants must meet the following criteria (applicable for both schemes):

- Must be Singapore citizens or permanent residents
- Must be Hindus
- Monthly household per capita income must not exceed $1,900

Value of Award

For the Tuition Subsidy, the subsidy will be up to 50% of the yearly tuition fee subject to a maximum as determined by the Sivadas-HEB Education Fund.

For the Education Grant, the grant is a one-time award, up to a maximum of $1,500 as determined by the Sivadas-HEB Education Fund.

Applications must be submitted on-line through the Hindu Endowments Board website (www.heb.org.sg)
For assistance, please call
Ms Hemma 6593 9209 / Mr Prakasam 6593 9211

Closing date for applications is 21 September 2022. Shortlisted applicants may be required to attend an interview within 3 weeks of the closing date.

PM Lee to deliver National Day Rally speech on Sunday

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong will deliver his National Day Rally speech on Sunday evening at the Institute of Technical Education headquarters in Ang Mo Kio.

He will speak in Malay from 6.45pm, Mandarin from 7pm and English from 8pm, the Prime Minister's Office said yesterday.

The Rally is seen as the most important political speech of the year. It traditionally involves policy changes and a charting of Singapore's future direction.

In his National Day message on Aug 8, PM Lee highlighted how the geopolitical environment – including United States-China relations – could have implications for Singapore.

He also gave an indication of two other topics he may address in his Rally speech – economic challenges and long-term planning for economic progress and social resilience.

He said that although Singapore's economy has emerged strongly from the Covid-19 pandemic, the outlook has clouded considerably, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine aggravating supply chain disruptions and inflation.

He noted that, in response, the Government had announced multiple support packages, tightened the exchange rate policy and strengthened the Singapore dollar.

On long-term planning, PM Lee said it is also about investing in people to reach their full potential, taking care of the elderly and vulnerable, fostering a common identity and building a brighter future for the younger generation.

He said Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong and the fourth-generation – or 4G – team have launched the Forward Singapore exercise to involve citizens in refreshing the social compact.

The National Day Rally will be broadcast on local television channels and radio stations, and live-streamed on the Prime Minister's Office's YouTube channel as well as the Facebook pages of PM Lee and government feedback unit Reach.

The Straits Times will live-stream the Rally on its website, Facebook page and YouTube channel. Follow live coverage on the website and get updates on the live blog.

Call for firms to be more productive as wages rise

Higher salaries for workers need not mean significant price hikes for consumers: Zaqy

Anjali Raguraman
Consumer Correspondent

Paying workers higher wages does not need to translate into significant price hikes for consumers, said Senior Minister of State for Manpower Zaqy Mohamad.

"We want things to be cost-effective, cost-efficient, affordable, but it should not be at the expense of low-wage workers," he said at the Ministry of Manpower, after announcing that the Government has accepted recommendations by the Tripartite Cluster for Retail Industry on its new Progressive Wage Model (PWM) for the sector.

He urged firms to look beyond business costs going up as a result of higher wages, and instead to work towards becoming more productive and cost-efficient.

"Ultimately, it is not just about wage increases, but how you continue to sustain increases over time," he said.

"It is important to look at business productivity, workforce productivity, as well as job redesign and how we improve work conditions too."

Under the new PWM for firms that hire foreign workers, wages for local workers such as retail assistants are expected to go up by 8.4 per cent to 8.5 per cent annually, from Sept 1 this year to Aug 31, 2025.

To help retailers cope, the Government will co-fund 75 per cent of the salary increase for workers earning gross monthly wages of up to $2,500 this year and 45 per cent for those with gross monthly wages of $2,500 to $3,000.

Mr Zaqy cited the evolution of the private security industry, which he said has seen a higher growth rate of local employees, including younger people, joining it.

It implemented the PWM as a licensing condition for private security agencies in September 2016.

Also, as part of the latest round of recommendations accepted by the Government last November, the basic monthly wage of security officers at the bottom of the salary ladder will more than double from $1,650 next year to $3,530 by 2028.

Mr Zaqy said the industry, which had many officers working overtime, has become more technologically ready, with the use of tools such as closed-circuit television cameras and sensors.

"It shows that with higher salaries, that doesn't mean you have to be less productive...

"You can train your workers to undertake a lot more meaningful tasks and not necessarily work longer hours."

The retail PWM is part of a range of progressive wage requirements that will take effect from Sept 1.

These include a new local qualifying salary rule for companies that hire foreign workers of $9 per hour in gross wages for part-timers, and $1,400 for full-time staff, with additional requirements for overtime; and the extension of the PWM to in-house cleaners, security officers and landscape workers.

The Tripartite Workgroup on Lower-Wage Workers also recommended the expansion of the PWM to the food services sector and occupations such as administrators and drivers next March.

Beyond seeing wages rise, Mr Zaqy also wants to see the various sectors become attractive to locals.

He said: "One aspect we have to think about is creating an environment where locals feel that their skills are valued and they can practise them, and that there is a future for (their chosen) sector...

"Then the whole dynamics change in terms of attractiveness to many of our local workers."

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Raising the pay of low-wage workers

The Progressive Wage Model (PWM) was introduced in 2012 by NTUC to raise the pay of local low wage workers and make such increases sustainable through skills upgrading. Since then, it has been implemented across several sectors, with retail being the latest one. Adeline Tan looks at the sectors that have adopted the model.

	When	Who	Baseline wages
Cleaning	Since September 2014	All Singapore citizens and permanent residents employed in outsourced cleaning jobs.	For example, cleaners earn at least **$1,312** to **$1,530** in basic monthly salary starting in July 2022, with wages increasing yearly. This will go up to at least **$2,420** to **$2,835** in 2028.
Security	Since September 2016	All Singapore citizens and PRs employed by licensed security agencies.	For example, security officers earn at least **$1,442** in basic monthly salary this year, with wages increasing yearly. This will be raised to at least **$3,530** in 2028.
Landscape	Since June 2016	All Singapore citizens and PRs in outsourced landscape maintenance jobs by landscape companies on NParks' Landscape Company Register.	For example, landscape workers earn at least **$1,650** in basic monthly salary in July 2022. This will go up to at least **$2,385** in 2028.
Lift and escalator maintenance	From 2022	All Singaporean and PR lift and escalator maintenance workers	For example, assistant lift and escalator specialists earn at least **$1,850** in 2022. This will go up to at least **$3,080** in 2028.

The PWM will be extended to other sectors, such as **food services** and **waste management**. From next month, it will be expanded to cover more employees, such as in-house local workers in the cleaning, landscape and security sectors.

Source: MINISTRY OF MANPOWER, NTUC STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS



A retail supervisor at homeware chain Iuiga's outlet in Paya Lebar Quarter mall. Business associations yesterday said taking on more costs will likely be a concern amid the challenging business operating environment. ST PHOTO: GIN TAY

Wage move welcome but added costs a concern: Business groups

Adeline Tan

Raising the wages of local retail staff is a welcome move, but taking on more costs will likely be a concern amid the challenging business operating environment, said business associations yesterday.

This comes after a slew of recommendations announced yesterday by the Tripartite Cluster for Retail Industry (TCR) under the Progressive Wage Model (PWM), in a move to boost low wages in the sector.

The wage increase will see local workers in firms that hire foreign workers get salary increases of 8.4 per cent to 8.5 per cent annually, from Sept 1 this year to Aug 31, 2025.

Singapore National Employers Federation executive director Sim Gim Guan said the wage growth may help attract part-timers and meet the sector's manpower needs.

But with the higher business costs that employers are already facing due to factors such as inflation, businesses would be concerned about absorbing costs or passing them on to consumers as this would affect their competitiveness, he said.

Support measures from the Government, such as the Progressive Wage Credit Scheme, would hopefully help to mitigate the impact of the wage increases.

The Singapore Retailers Association (SRA) said the wage increases will help to make the sector more attractive.

But labour costs have risen substantially, even before the implementation of the PWM, said SRA executive director Rose Tong.

With employers having to pay a baseline wage, competition for local workers will also become more intense, adding to the difficulty in finding such workers.

Ms Tong added: "It will also be more expensive for smaller retailers such as neighbourhood shops to hire. Those who pay more with better employer branding and staff benefits will be better positioned to attract retail talent and retain existing staff."

Bigger retailers, such as fashion chain Uniqlo, have already taken steps to boost staff wages to attract and retain talent.

Uniqlo Singapore's human resource director Juliana Tan said the company bumped up all its store employees' salaries by an average of 23 per cent to 25 per cent in June. It has about 1,200 Singaporean and permanent resident employees islandwide.

The PWM will help to keep the sector attractive to locals, but the fashion chain has also put in place training opportunities for its staff, Ms Tan added.

Singapore Business Federation chief executive Lam Yi Young said that while the recommendations by TCR are welcome, retailers will also need to take steps to make sure these wage increases are sustainable.

He said: "Retailers need to press on with transformation efforts to increase productivity, and grow and diversify their supply chains and markets. This is especially important in the face of rising inflation and cost pressures."

The current inflationary environment will continue to put pressure on wages, said Professor Lawrence Loh from the National University of Singapore Business School.

While the wage growth increases are significant and commendable, wages are dynamic and will nevertheless be adjusted by market forces.

Prof Loh said: "The competition for labour will continue to intensify as many markets transit out of the pandemic. Retailers may even have to consider increases over and above those offered by the PWM to attract workers."

TOUGHER FOR SMALL RETAILERS

It will be more expensive for smaller retailers such as neighbourhood shops to hire. Those who pay more with better employer branding and staff benefits will be better positioned to attract retail talent and retain existing staff.

MS ROSE TONG, executive director of the Singapore Retailers Association.

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2 in 5 here will not accept a job if they can't work from home: Poll

Choo Yun Ting
Business Correspondent

Two in five workers in Singapore will not accept a job if they are not able to work from home, according to a recent study.

About 80 per cent of the 1,000 employees surveyed also said that having flexible working hours is important to them, and 41 per cent will not take up a job if they cannot work during the hours they want.

The biannual study, conducted by human resources solutions agency Randstad, polled workers aged between 18 and 67 in Singapore earlier this year.

About one-quarter of the respondents, or 27 per cent, said they have quit a job because it did not provide enough flexibility in terms of working hours and location.

Ms Jaya Dass, managing director at Randstad Singapore and Malaysia, noted that even though flexible working arrangements are important to Singapore workers, not all companies offer them as an option in the current Covid-19 environment.

Only 52 per cent of those surveyed said their employers provide them with remote working options, and 60 per cent said their jobs have flexible hours.

"Hence, employees who value the flexibility to decide when and where they want to work may seek to work for other employers that offer these options," said Ms Jaya.

"Employers who want to retain their employees should consider offering more flexible work models to meet the changing talent expectations that have been brought about and exacerbated by the pandemic," she added.

Some 41 per cent of the Singapore workers polled said they would rather be unemployed than feel unhappy in their jobs.

Slightly over half of the respondents, or 52 per cent, said they would quit if their jobs prevented them from enjoying life.

More employers here are offering flexible work arrangements and other hybrid work options as Singapore moves towards living with Covid-19.

The public service and large corporations are adopting practices such as allowing staff to work from home on some days of the week, and staggered working hours.

Dr David Leong, managing director of human resources advisory firm PeopleWorldwide Consulting, said flexibility in work arrangements will increasingly be seen as an employee entitlement, if not normalised.

"Those who would not accept a job if they cannot work from home must consider if their demand is reasonable and the work's context," he said.

"In a market with more jobs than job seekers, workers can afford to be choosy."

But he cautioned: "The tide can turn when there are more job seekers than jobs."

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吸引和留住人才

工教院理工院检讨教职员薪金框架

工艺教育学院和五所理工学院属中学后教育学府，它们上一次检讨教职员薪酬是在2017年，当时将大学毕业生和非大学毕业生的薪资结构合并。

杨浚鑫 报道
yeoch@sph.com.sg

工艺教育学院和五所理工学院时隔五年联合检讨薪酬结构，确保各级工作岗位的工资保持市场竞争力，以吸引和留住拥有紧缺技能的人才。

淡马锡理工6月22日在政府电子商务网站GeBIZ发布招标文件，邀请业者为这次联合检讨提供咨询服务。

工艺教育学院和五所理工学院属中学后教育学府（Post-Secondary Education Institutions，简称PSEI），它们上一次检讨薪酬是在2017年，当时将大学毕业生和非大学毕业生的薪资结构合并。

这个薪酬结构会定期经历联合检讨，确保它跟得上不断变化的市场环境。由工艺教育学院和五所理工代表组成的联合薪酬检讨委员会（简称委员会）负责这项检讨工作。

根据招标文件，得标业者所须提供的咨询服务分两部分，第一部分是对薪酬结构进行市场基准分析，确保具竞争力。

第二部分则进一步细分为三个工作重点：一、对300个工作岗位进行彻底分析与评估，确定它们在薪酬结构内的级别是适当的；二、检讨支付给持续教育培训（Continuing Education Training）教职员和非教职员的费用；以及三、制定并推荐一套框架或方法，加强PSEI吸引和留住拥有紧缺技能人才的能力。

招标在7月14日（星期四）截止。得标业者须在成功得标的两个月内，就第一部分内容向委员会提呈报告，预计是2022年11月2日。

第二部分内容则须在成功得标的九个月内完成，预计是2023年6月30日。

招标文件未说明这个时候开展联合检讨的原因，但在提到工作岗位分析与评估时，强调这是考虑到“科技与外部环境改变，包括教育界的变化，所带来的工作职能与岗位的演化”。

对此，人力资源公司仁立国际执行董事梁昌国受访时说，外部环境迅速演变，须检讨教育框架，以确保培训与技能，适用于新兴和具潜力的行业或领域。

陈振声：正在检讨教师、辅导员和其他教育部官员工资

他注意到新加坡从海外引进的就业准证和S准证人才，不少拥有软件开发、网络安全、金融科技、人工智能、机器人技术、数据科学与分析、生物医学或生物技术，以及绿色能源科技等领域的资讯科技技能。他因此认为，PSEI要吸引和留住的人才，正是那些能提供相关培训与技能，让新加坡人进入这些领域的教育工作者。

教育部长陈振声7月5日在国会书面答复议员提问时说，教育部正同公共服务署合作，检讨教师、辅导员和其他教育部官员的工资。

政府国会教育委员会主席郑德源受访时说，随着教育部和公共服务署开展对薪酬与福利的检讨，在这个时候确保教育工作者及工艺教育学院和理工学院其他职员能获得公平且具竞争力的薪酬，并跟得上包括教育界在内不同领域的整体工资增长，是适时和重要的。

IHH医保集团聘用自闭症员工为特需者创造终身就业机会

刘钰铃 报道
lyuling@sph.com.sg

在本地拥有四家私人医院的新加坡IHH医疗保健两年前开始同新加坡自闭症资源中心合作，为自闭症者提供就业机会，以协助他们更好地融入职场。

新加坡IHH医疗保健企业总监陈惠安受询时说，院方认为自闭症者具备的特质和技能符合院内一些工作的要求，因此决定与新加坡自闭症资源中心（Autism Resource Centre）合作聘用适任的自闭症者。集团旗下的医院包括伊丽莎白医院、伊丽莎白诺维娜医院、鹰阁医院和百汇东岸医院。

伊丽莎白诺维娜医院目前聘请了六名特需者，他们主要在药房、放射科和餐饮部门工作。黄谟锜（20多岁）是任职于这家医院的自闭症者之一，他在自闭症资源中心的就业与职能培训中心（Employability and Employment Centre）完成三个月的职能培训后，去年1月起在医院的放射部门担任分类员，负责整理和核对相关文件等，有时也做行政工作。

参加中心培训计划的特需者必须经过五个阶段的培训过程。职业导师会先评估他们的强项和学习需求、再为他们量身定制培训课程，并安排合适的工作，以及帮助他们适应工作环境。

指导黄谟锜的职业导师傅淑慧说，除了教导工作所需的技能，她也会为他设定可实现的目标，这有助他发掘自身的长处，在工作与生活中最大限度地发挥潜力。“黄谟锜很懂事也非常好学……他在受训时很勤奋，一心想要获得工作机会。我很高兴培训计划能帮助他适应新工作，也有益于他的职业发展。”

热爱这份工作的黄谟锜受访时说，职业导师和医院的主管与同事都很有耐心。自从接受培训以来，他也掌握了不少技术知识和软技能，并了解团队合作的重要。

“我和其他人交流时不一定能清楚表达自己，不过我的的主管和职业导师会为我准备简单的稿子来帮助我克服问题，方便我与他人沟通。我现在和同事讨论工作时也更自信。”

黄谟锜的主管、伊丽莎白诺维娜医院放射与核医学部门高级执行医药秘书萨利赫（Norchahya Bte Saleh）指出，黄谟锜注重细节、乐于助人，能够遵循特定工作流程，并独立完成简单的任务。这有助减轻其他员工的工作量，让他们能专注于处理病患的询问。



黄谟锜是伊丽莎白诺维娜医院聘用的一名特需者，他去年1月起在医院的放射部门担任分类员。（伊丽莎白诺维娜医院提供）

萨利赫说：“黄谟锜现在更善于交际，如果遇到不清楚的地方，也敢于发问。在沟通技巧方面，他还有待进步，但我能看到他每天都在尽最大努力来提升自己。”

陈惠安说，新加坡IHH医疗保健希望为特需者创造终身就业的机会，集团接下来也计划聘请更多特需者。她补充，这些有轻度辅助需求的员工态度严谨，且工作表现稳定，这让集团得以提升工作流程，从而为病患及他们的家人提供更好的护理和服务。

市场动荡中的
ESG投资展望



如何在这动荡不安的金融市场中成为“中流砥柱”？获得各国企业重点关注的环境、社会及治理（ESG）是重要驱动力。ESG投资经过几年来的推展，如今已成为投资界的主流共识。

ESG对投资者意味着什么？是营销噱头还是实际投入？是昙花一现还是长期增长？

参与此座谈会，跟着业界专家一起面对面探讨ESG理念和投资展望。

日期 2022年7月16日（星期六）
地点 滨海湾金沙会议展览中心，三楼

现场座谈会
下午2时至4时30分
每人29元（提供茶点招待）

线上直播
下午2时至3时30分
免费通过 Zoom 观看直播

请扫描QR码或上网到
zbesg.sphevents.com.sg
现场座谈会名额有限，即刻报名。

嘉宾



卢耀群教授
新加坡国立大学商学院治理与永续发展研究所所长



林勇翰
新加坡交易所集团研究与股票部总监



马远思
汇丰银行（中国）有限公司资深投资产品专家

主持人
胡渊文
《联合早报》财经新闻副主任

主办单位：联合早报 LIANHE ZAOBAO
呈献机构：HSBC

新报业媒体活动

SEA HORSE

哈芝节优惠
产品低至4折发售
*详情请进店咨询
门市地址
客服WhatsApp

珊瑚枕
CORAL4L-4-5V-PP
5折
原价:$ 21
$9

轩琴居涨气记忆枕
P-AIR4V
4折
原价:$79
$32

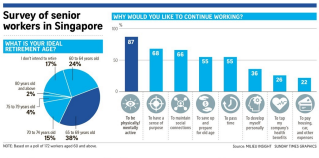
海马枕(乳胶质感系列)
SEA4L-4-5V
6折
原价:$ 99
$60

轩琴居SOFT三折床褥
SOFT-3FO-36-75-3V
36"X75"X3"
65折
原价:$ 179
$117

海马床褥(乳胶质感系列)
SEA-ALL-60-75-866V
60"x75"x8.66"
65折
原价:$1189
$773

芬兰/新西兰实木床架
KD02N-A-6075-V
*适用于60"X75"床褥
5折
原价:$ 259
$130

轩琴居真皮面电动弹铰梳化
SOF7C-3-HINGE
6折
原价:$ 1889
$1134





3 in 4 older workers don't intend to retire before 65

Top reasons include staying active, having a sense of purpose and saving up for old age

Calvin Yang
Assistant News Editor

Three in four older workers in Singapore have no intention of stopping work before they turn 65.

The top reasons for wanting to remain employed are to stay active, have a sense of purpose, maintain social connections and save up for old age, a study commissioned by The Straits Times has found.

From last Friday, the retirement age for Singapore workers was raised from 63 to 63, and the re-employment age from 67 to 68. This is part of a gradual increase to address an ageing workforce, with the retirement age set at 65 and the re-employment age at 70 by 2030.

The changes complement the government and re-employment ages will push more employers to tap the older talent pool amid a rising global talent shortage.

But it is unclear if employers have come to offer to re-employ eligible workers when they hit retirement age. This is crucial, given the tight labour market, said the ministry.

MOM encourages firms to adopt higher retirement and re-employment ages, and to put in place arrangements via efforts such as the Senior Worker Early Adopter Recognition (Swear) programme.

As at May, more than 1,200 firms have successfully applied for this grant and committed to raise their internal age caps, said the ministry. This has benefited more than 44,000 senior workers.

Mr David Leong, managing director of human resources firm Peoplebank Singapore, said: "Many of our seniors want to work as they may not get family support, while others like to be in the know."

Ms Linda Tee, country manager of Miles Insight, said: "Singapore has an ageing workforce. Lifting the age limits will help retain skilled older workers. Companies also benefit from being able to retain most of their older workers, reducing the need to hire and train new employees."

The study commissioned by ST polled 112 workers aged 50 and above. The survey was conducted by consumer research firm Miles Insight in April.

There remains concerns among respondents that senior workers are passed over on opportunities, have a tough time adjusting to new technology and are unable to put in long hours due to personal or health reasons.

To address concerns, more employers have tried to build an age-friendly workplace, such as redesigning jobs and having flexible arrangements.



Mr William Yeo, 62, who has been with the People's Association for about 40 years, says he can share his experience with his juniors while Mr Ng Kai Chuen, 66, has been with staff such as cleaners and security officers.

ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH

The public service – Singapore's largest employer – took the lead to raise the retirement age to 63 and offer re-employment to eligible officers until 68 from last July – a year before the rest of the workforce.

It has stepped up efforts to help its officers to stay relevant, including redesigning jobs, reskilling staff, implementing job rotations and offering more part-time jobs, said the Public Service Division.

"Our officers can also tap in-house career coaches for advice," it said.

Other employers have also adopted the revised age capacity.

Ms Cheong Jewellery, for instance, has nine staff aged above 64. To support older workers, the jewellery business has redesigned jobs to embrace technology, offered flexible work arrangements, and provided training, career and development opportunities.

Its managing director, Mr Ho Nai Chuen, said: "So long as the employees performed satisfactorily, they were allowed to continue working beyond the retirement age, until they are physically unfit to work."

Mr Ng Kai Chuen, 66, a security manager, said: "Seeing as the employees are experienced and therefore integral to its operations. They also have good work ethics, which serves as a good example for their younger colleagues, he added.

The hotel has 42 staff over the age of 66, representing 1 per cent of its workforce. It has also trained workers on the same pay and benefits even after they move to yearly contracts after retirement.

Older workers believe they offer more than what the latest tech can learn from textbooks.

Mr William Yeo, who has been with the People's Association for the past 40 years, said: "I will provide a listening ear (to my juniors) and share with them the experiences I have acquired."

The 62-year-old deputy constituency director of the Bukit Batok West-Punggol Constituency Office added: "I also learn from them because I am not familiar with how we can use technology, such as virtual meeting software or social media."

Warren Golf and Country Club senior accounts assistant Jane Ang said: "Although I am old, I still like to be connected and keep busy and active, said: "As long as I am healthy, I will continue to work and contribute."

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THEN BENEFITS

As Singapore has an ageing workforce, lifting the age limits will help retain skilled older workers. Companies also benefit from being able to retain most of their older workers, reducing the need to hire and train new employees.

MS LINDA TEE, country manager of Peoplebank Group Singapore.

MENTORING JUNIORS

I will provide a listening ear (to my juniors) and share with them the experiences I have acquired.

MR WILLIAM YEO, deputy constituency director of the Bukit Batok West-Punggol Constituency Office.

PERFORMANCE MATTERS, NOT AGE

So long as the employees performed satisfactorily, they were allowed to continue working beyond the retirement age, until they are physically unfit to work.

MR NG KAI CHUEN, managing director of Ch Cheong Jewellery.

Majority of platform workers have no immediate plans to leave their jobs: Poll

This is even though most joined gig economy during pandemic and job market is recovering

Bryan Cheong
and Varun Karthik

About seven in 10 platform workers here joined the gig economy during the Covid-19 pandemic, a street poll by The Sunday Times has found.

But despite the recovering job market, only one in four of the 78 platform workers surveyed last month – 30 full-timers and 48 part-timers – has plans to leave the job within the year.

And observers are not surprised, given that such workers get to choose when they want to work and can boost their earnings if they work more hours.

Platform workers – who include delivery workers and private-hire car drivers – rely on online platforms for their income. They comprise about 3 per cent of Singapore's resident workforce, or 79,000 people.

Yet such workers still have concerns about rising living costs, unpredictable incomes, long working hours and the lack of career progression, according to the poll.

When asked why many still plan to continue with their roles, Dr David Leong, managing director of human resources firm People-Worldwide Consulting, posited that gig work allows them to work at their own pace. They are also free from work pressure and office politics.

Dr Leong added: "Gig jobs have low qualifying bars and admit any workers willing to commit time and resources. Any warm bodies ready to perform the assigned task are welcomed."

However, Ms Linda Teo, country manager of workforce solutions firm ManpowerGroup Singapore, said that while such work might pay lower-skilled workers well as compared with other suitable jobs, it might not be a sustainable option for those with higher qualifications, due to a lack of career progression.

"This is especially so for individuals who are in the early stages of their career as they may fall behind the curve in comparison to their peers who have been working in higher-skilled roles," she said.

Ms Teo added: "Platform workers have to realise that the high pay comes from working long hours and fulfilling large quantities of orders. Once they are unable to meet these two main criteria, their income will be greatly impacted."

Platform work also gives workers who do not have the relevant skills to switch jobs an alternative career option.

Private-hire driver Jeremiah Cheong, 51, has been with Grab for over three years. He has no plans to change jobs, due to a mismatch between his skills and what is needed in the current labour market.

He said: "At this age, after leaving the construction sector and without any relevant skills to seek em-



Platform workers, who include food delivery riders and private-hire car drivers, comprise about 3 per cent of Singapore's resident workforce, or 79,000 people. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

GREATER FLEXIBILITY

Sometimes, I would have to take my mother to the hospital for check-ups. With my previous job, I could not take time off to do that. But with delivery riding, I feel like I have the flexibility to cater to her needs.

MR MUHAMMAD FARHAN MOHAMAD HAMDI, a former sales associate. The 32-year-old took up food delivery work with foodpanda in 2019 so he could set aside more time to care for his 67-year-old mother.

40 hours

How long he works a week

$2,200

Approximate monthly food delivery income, which he says is similar to his previous pay.



Madam Nur Aisyah Sukor and Mr Ahmad Nidzam Abdul Razak with four of their five children. To make ends meet, the couple make sure they set aside 10 per cent of their monthly earnings. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

FAMILY FIRST

Our family comes first. It doesn't matter what we do, family is first. Everything else is secondary.

MADAM NUR AISYAH SUKOR

$4,000

The couple's combined monthly income.

Couple manage to raise five kids on combined food delivery income

Deon Loke

Mr Ahmad Nidzam Abdul Razak and Madam Nur Aisyah Sukor work as full-time food delivery riders to raise their five children.

The couple's children are between 11 months and nine years old.

Mr Ahmad and Madam Aisyah earn a combined monthly income of about $4,000.

Madam Aisyah, 33, admitted: "There are people who say, 'You are just a food delivery rider; how do you feed your family?'"

Early last year, Mr Ahmad, 34, was let go from his trailer driver job after suffering a hand injury.

His wife was then heavily pregnant with their fifth child.

After regaining his confidence in riding a bicycle, he began working as a full-time GrabFood delivery rider in March last year to support his family.

"I was working part-time with Grab since 2019, so I already knew how it worked," he said.

Madam Aisyah, who used to be a manager at McDonald's, wanted to rejoin the workforce but found it tough juggling work with caregiving commitments.

"When my husband was doing Grab, I observed and thought maybe I could join too," she said.

The flexibility was a draw for the couple.

Madam Aisyah, who started the job in March this year, said: "You don't have to answer to anyone. You have more control, and you can focus on taking care of the family."

On a typical day, both of them wake up at 5am and take their children to school before starting their shift at 9am.

While she ends work at 5pm to look after the children, he continues working till about 9pm.

They take turns to pick up their children from the babysitter and after-school student care centres.

To make ends meet, the couple make sure they set aside 10 per cent of their monthly earnings.

"You have to think, 'How am I supposed to support my family, pay for the home? How are we going to be self-sufficient?' The platform isn't a stable form of income," said Madam Aisyah, stressing the need to save for rainy days.

Mr Ahmad added: "You really have to have some discipline. Whatever you do, you have to plan for it."

When asked if they plan to continue doing food delivery in the long run, the couple said that they enjoy their jobs and the time they get to spend together as a family.

Madam Aisyah said: "Our family comes first. It doesn't matter what we do, family is first. Everything else is secondary."

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* Additional reporting by Varun Karthik

GETTING REJECTED

Employers feel that driving Grab is not a proper job and does not require a skill set, so they think I have been doing nothing. Even if the pay offered is lower than what I earn now, I still get rejected straight away.

MR JEEVAN JOHN MENON, on how all his job applications have been rejected.



Mr Jeevan John Menon drives from 2pm till midnight daily. He says the long hours on the road make it tough for him to devote time and energy to go for interviews to re-enter the corporate world. ST PHOTO: FELINE LIM

Business graduate plies the roads as private-hire driver 10 hours a day

Kolette Lim

Mr Jeevan John Menon has a university degree, but for the past nine months, he has been working 10 hours a day as a private-hire driver.

The 31-year-old, who graduated with a Bachelor of Business Studies (Honours) in Management from University College Dublin in 2017, is now concerned that he will not be able to return to a corporate job.

Mr Menon, who previously worked in the marketing, technology and customer service fields, said: "I know I am not fulfilling any potential, and I am meant to do more in my life – this thought nags at me every day when I get on the road."

When he was retrenched as an account manager at a construction company last August, he went right into private-hire driving. Then, he was planning to apply for a Build-To-Order flat with his girlfriend and needed money.

And even though Mr Menon has been actively job hunting, all his ap-

WORLD

China's Xi playing long game despite posturing

The Chinese army said it held a large-scale military exercise around Taiwan as a "stern warning" over President Joe Biden's "gaffe" that the US would defend Taiwan if China attacks the self-ruled island. But for all of Beijing's military posturing, President Xi Jinping is in for the long game. A12&13



OPINION

Why China should worry about the IPEF

US President Joe Biden unveiled last week the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), his administration's long-awaited strategy to step up its economic engagement with the Asia-Pacific. China correspondent Danson Cheong says interest in the IPEF reflects concern over China's rising influence and assertiveness. A17



SINGAPORE

Endangered orchids growing well in tanks

Two critically endangered orchid species that were last year saved by National Parks Board staff from being trampled on by hikers in Clementi Forest have been growing well in tanks. This gives researchers hope that more of these orchids can be grown in tanks and reintroduced to other nature areas here. B4

Recent NUS, NTU grads can head to Britain to find job with new visa

Scheme offers visa to recent grads of top unis outside Britain in bid to attract global talent

Sandra Davie
Senior Education Correspondent

Recent National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) graduates will be able to head to Britain to look for jobs under a new visa designed to give British businesses access to graduates from the world's top universities.

According to the British High Commission in Singapore, the United Kingdom's High Potential Individual (HPI) visa, which will be open to applicants from today, was introduced as part of a broader post-Brexit government strategy to be more globally competitive.

The scheme offers visas to people who completed a degree from top universities outside Britain within the last five years.

NUS and NTU appear on the British Home Office's Top Global Universities list, which includes Harvard University, Stanford University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the United States, the University of Toronto in Canada, Peking University and Tsinghua University in China, and the University of Tokyo in Japan.

International students in British universities are not included in the scheme, as they come under the UK graduate visa scheme, which allows those who have completed a degree in Britain to stay for at least two years after graduating.

To be included in the HPI visa list, the universities must have been placed in the Top 50 positions in at least two of the following world rankings: Times Higher Education World University Rankings, QS World University Rankings and the Academic Ranking of World Universities by Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

In the latest Times Higher Education world ranking, NUS was placed 21st, while NTU was placed 46th.

Besides having a bachelor's, master's or a PhD from one of the universities on the list, applicants also have to meet English language requirements and have at least £1,270 (S$2,200) available in cash.

Applicants need not have a job offer to qualify for the HPI visa.

After arriving in Britain, visa holders with a bachelor's or master's degree will have two years to look for a job, while those with a PhD will be given three years to look for jobs. Visa holders can look for jobs in any industry.

Mr David Leong, who heads recruitment firm PeopleWorldwide Consulting, said that local graduates would find the visa scheme attractive, and added that it should be seen as "brain gain" for Singapore in the long run rather than "brain drain".

"It is good for young people to go out into the world and gain exposure and experience in vibrant economies. In some industries such as finance, there are many exciting opportunities in London."

He said British firms will be keen on Singapore graduates as they are well trained and have a good work ethic.

They also have skills, such as the ability to speak Mandarin and other Asian languages, which will give them an edge.

Recent NUS law graduate Desmond Lee said he is likely to apply for the visa later this year.

The 27-year-old, who is working in a law firm, is interested in going into the finance industry and has been thinking about heading to London.

"I do corporate law and I am interested in going into fintech because I see many opportunities there.

"It will be great if I can go to London for a few months, network and look for a job there, instead of trying to do it from here," he said.

NUS president Tan Eng Chye said he was heartened that NUS graduates are eligible for the new visa and called it a strong validation of the global competitiveness of NUS graduates.

He added: "We will continue to champion interdisciplinary teaching and learning to nurture highly skilled, adaptable and resilient graduates who can make positive contributions as global citizens of the future."

NTU's deputy provost for education Tan Ooi Kiang said: "NTU graduates will be well placed to reap the benefits of this new scheme, having been exposed to various overseas offerings as part of the NTU experience, where our students get the opportunity to go on overseas internships and immersion programmes to expand their horizons and develop global perspectives."

But Associate Professor Jason Tan from the National Institute of Education questioned the qualification criteria used for the visa.

"The students from the other local universities have similar and, in some disciplines, even better job outcomes. But because their universities do not appear in the top 50 list, they are left out," he said.

"There are many good universities in Singapore and around the world that will not do well in these rankings because they are not large, comprehensive universities with high research output, which is given significant weightage in these rankings."

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BRAIN GAIN FOR SINGAPORE

It is good for young people to go out into the world and gain exposure and experience in vibrant economies. In some industries such as finance, there are many exciting opportunities in London.

MR DAVID LEONG, who heads recruitment firm PeopleWorldwide Consulting, said the visa scheme should be seen as "brain gain" in the long run rather than "brain drain".



Swimmers cooling off at Bishan Sports Complex last Friday. There was a daily average of 23,000 people at public pools on the first three weekends this month. The highest daily recorded number to date was 32,000 on May 22, a Sport Singapore spokesman said.



Barber Taufiq Yusof, co-founder of Bodeiga Barbershop in Boat Quay, serving a customer last Friday. He said there was a 20 per cent increase in customers last month and this month, compared with previous months, with a spike in requests for shorter hairstyles.



A technician with Wira Aircon Services, which has seen urgent requests for servicing increase by 40 per cent in the past three weeks, with most requiring an overhaul of the air-conditioning system. It also has to undertake more extensive work such as changing air-con pipes and condensers almost daily.

As S'pore sizzles, more flock to pools, get haircuts, service air-cons

Kolette Lim and See Yi Ro

For barber Taufiq Yusof, the co-founder of Bodeiga Barbershop in Boat Quay, the recent heat has meant more requests for shorter hairstyles.

The heat has also been driving more people to take a dip in swimming pools and to service their air-conditioning systems.

On April 1, the mercury hit 36.8 deg C in Admiralty, just 0.2 deg C shy of the all-time high recorded in Tengah on April 17, 1983.

There has been little respite this month, with the National Environment Agency's Meteorological Service Singapore earlier predicting daily maximum temperatures of between 34 deg C and 35 deg C.

Due to high humidity and low wind speeds in urban Singapore, the hot weather is expected to last.

But that has been good news for some businesses.

Hair salons and barbershops said customers have been opting for shorter hairstyles.

Mr Taufiq, 29, said there was a 20 per cent increase in customers last month and this month, compared with previous months.

He said: "Almost every conversation with clients would start off with the weather and half of them would say it felt cooler after getting their hair cut."

Be Salon director Sham Adam, 38, said 30 per cent of the hair salon's female customers in the past two months chose hairstyles like the short bob.

Ms Teh Sue-Fen, 42, went to Kimage hair salon's Tampines branch to have her hair cut from mid-back length to shoulder length.

The housewife said: "Long hair is very uncomfortable in the heat, especially when I sweat and my hair gets damp."

Public swimming pools are also getting more crowded.

ActiveSG said there was a 26 per cent increase in traffic at swimming pools between May 1 and May 23, compared with the same period in 2019.

It added that the high temperatures and easing of Covid-19 measures brought in the crowds recently.

There was a daily average of 23,000 people at public pools on the first three weekends this month.

The highest daily recorded number to date was 32,000 on May 22, a Sport Singapore spokesman said.

Air-con retailers and service providers have received more inquiries.

Home appliance brand Europlace's product marketing manager Benson To said demand for most cooling products such as air-cons and fans increased by around 50 per cent last month.

Air-con servicing companies – such as Wira Aircon Services, iAircon Singapore and Mr Cool Aircon Services – are enjoying booming business.

Mr Rafiuddin Ismail, 38, managing director of Wira Aircon Services, said: "In the past three weeks, urgent requests for servicing within a day have increased by 40 per cent, with most requiring an overhaul of the air-conditioning system."

Requests for air-con repair and installation services have risen as well. The company also has to undertake more extensive work such as changing the air-con pipes and condensers almost daily.

Food and beverage outlets have been busier too, due to the hot weather.

Creatr., a cafe in Stirling Road that specialises in locally inspired dishes, has seen a 20 per cent increase in ice cream being sold, said owner Leon Lim, 33.

Aircraft technician Nor Zaihan, 45, was at Three's A Crowd cafe in Tampines, which serves ice cream and waffles.

He consumes cold drinks or ice cream at least once a day.

He added: "Nothing beats cold desserts in this sweltering heat."

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Aircraft technician Nor Zaihan cooling off with an ice cream, with his wife Syaza Adawiyah, a client service executive, at Three's A Crowd cafe in Tampines last Friday. He consumes cold drinks or ice cream at least once a day to beat the heat. ST PHOTOS: ONG WEE JIN, DESMOND FOO, GAVIN FOO, KOLETTE LIM