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Speech by Minister of State for Manpower, Mr Zaqy Mohamad at Supplementary Budget Debate 2020

7 April 2020 | [Employment practices](#)

A. Introduction

A1. Minister for Manpower used the word “surreal” as she described the chamber. Seeing us seated all spaced out, a reflection of the times that we are facing – to overcome a crisis that will define this generation, our generation.

A2. Having spent the last few weeks, engaging employers, workers and ordinary citizens, the anxiety shows. For those whom I’ve met whose livelihoods have been affected, I thank them for their calm and their willingness to work with us to get through this crisis.

A3. Many hope for the best, some plan for the worst. With three Budgets in the space of 2 months – the Unity, the Resilience and the Solidarity Budgets – the leadership, care and concern of this Government shows as it prepares Singapore for the best, the worst and everything that comes in between.

A4. For the Ministry of Manpower, our priorities are clear - to Save Jobs, to Protect Our Workers and to Support Their Livelihoods. In these difficult times, we are especially concerned for those who are more vulnerable – our lower-wage workers, the self-employed persons (SEPs), and our foreign workers.

B. Supporting Self-Employed Persons (SEPs)

B1 I will first address our efforts for SEPs. Many SEPs have seen their livelihoods badly affected amidst this COVID-19 situation.

Income Relief for SEPs

B2. To help Singaporean SEPs with less means and family support tide through this period of extraordinary economic uncertainty, we introduced the SEP Income Relief Scheme (SIRS) as part of the Resilience Budget and enhanced it in the Solidarity Budget.

B3. All eligible Singaporean SEPs will receive direct cash assistance through three quarterly cash payouts of \$3,000 each, or \$9,000 in total.

B4. SIRS will provide cash assistance to SEPs most in need quickly. We want the cash assistance to reach our SEPs fast. So, we used Workfare criteria as a starting point, and further expanded the criteria to cover almost double the number of SEPs as Workfare.

B5. Hence, there is no need for most eligible SEPs to apply.

a. Eligible SEPs aged 37 and above who declared a positive net trade income to IRAS or CPF for 2018 will be automatically notified via letter and SMS in end May 2020.

b. They will receive the first payout automatically in end May, followed by July and October this year.

B6. We know that some SEPs who do not qualify automatically are worried. They hope to be considered. For instance,

a. SEPs who are aged 21 to 36 in 2020, but otherwise meet the criteria; and

b. SEPs whose spouses earn a high income but have many people at home to support.

B7. My colleagues and I will try our best to consider the applications of those who did not qualify automatically, particularly those aged 21 to 36 in 2020 but otherwise meet the criteria. We will also seriously consider the appeals of those who narrowly missed the eligibility criteria.

B8. I am glad that NTUC Secretary-General has offered to front the application and appeals of SIRS. MOM will work with NTUC to provide details on how to apply, and how those who do not meet the SIRS criteria can appeal very soon. We seek your patience and understanding.

Training Support for SEPs to upskill

B9. During this downturn, we want SEPs who have spare capacity to train and upskill themselves for the coming upturn. To support them, we announced a new SEP Training Support Scheme (STSS) during COS last month.

B10. SEPs who take up any SkillsFuture Series courses and other selected training programmes can receive an hourly training allowance of \$7.50 that will help defray their daily expenses. This was for a period of three months, and is on top of the substantial course fees subsidies of up to 90%.

B11. The Government has now extended the STSS till the end of the year.

B12. We will also increase the hourly training allowance from \$7.50 to \$10, with effect from 1 May 2020. There is no cap to how much training SEPs can sign up for. For example, a self-employed private hire car or bus driver who spends 10 full days of training in a month can receive \$800 of training allowance in that month.

B13. The STSS is administered by NTUC's e2i. Applications have already started since 1 April 2020. SEPs can refer to NTUC's website for more details. We encourage all SEPs to tap on this training support.

C. Supporting Lower-Wage Workers

C1. During these difficult times, it is also important for us to pay special attention to another vulnerable group – our lower-wage workers. Many, such as our cleaners and security officers, are critical to the provision of essential services during this COVID-19 pandemic.

Enhanced Workfare Special Payment

C2. At Budget 2020, we announced that lower-wage workers on Workfare will receive a Workfare Special Payment (WSP). They would receive an additional 20 per cent of their Workfare payout for work done in 2019, with a minimum payment of \$100. This was to be paid in November.

C3. We will enhance WSP to step up support for our lower-wage workers, including SEPs, earning up to \$2,000 per month in 2019.

a. They will receive an enhanced WSP of \$3,000 each, fully in cash.

- b. CPF Board will pay eligible Workfare recipients two payouts of \$1,500 earlier, in July and October this year.
- c. There is no need to apply. Eligible recipients will be notified and paid automatically by CPF Board.

Enhanced Workfare Income Supplement Scheme

C4. Lower-wage workers will continue to receive additional support through the enhanced Workfare Income Supplement (WIS).

- a. The qualifying income ceiling and maximum annual payouts have both gone up since January 2020.
- b. More workers can benefit from greater Workfare support of up to \$4,000 a year.

C5. In his speech yesterday, Member Pritam Singh spoke about adopting a 'living wage'. In times like these, no 'minimum wage' or 'living wage' system can help low-wage workers. When there is no work, there is no salary, no minimum wage to talk about, when firms are unable to pay for workers.

C6. Workfare is the reason why the Government can calibrate the \$3000 Workfare Special Payment – or any other wage support needed later - for our low-wage workers, who are vulnerable and who need our support. This, on top of the Jobs Support Scheme that we are providing to companies.

C7. We complement the approach with the Progressive Wage Model for our cleaners, security officers, and landscape workers. Unlike the minimum wage or 'living wage', we take a multi-layered approach to support our lower-wage workers, and which is effective, especially in these times of need.

Enhancements to the Short-Term Relief Fund

C8. As the impact on our economy deepens, more firms may close. The Short-Term Relief Fund today provides financial help to lower-wage workers whose employers are unable to pay them wages due to financial difficulties or business failure.

C9. Since 1 April this year, we have increased the support from the fund, from up to one month's salary, capped at \$1,000 today, to up to two months' salary, capped at \$4,600, depending on the worker's income.

C10. To help more workers, we have extended the coverage of the fund beyond lower-wage workers to cover half the workforce.

D. Protecting Foreign Workers

D1. While we look out for our local workers, it is just as important that we take good care of our foreign workers. Some members highlighted media coverage that conditions in the S11 Dormitory @ Punggol were poor.

D2. MOM last inspected the dormitory on 4 March 2020 and found that the dormitory was clean and the conditions were found to be satisfactory.

D3. As members would all know by now, as a result of the evolving Covid-19 situation, the Ministry of Health gazetted the S11 Dormitory @ Punggol and Westlite Toh Guan Dormitory as isolation areas two days ago.

D4. We acknowledge the challenges at the start to prepare the living areas for isolation while quarantine was going on. These are not normal times, and while not ideal, the dorm conditions admittedly, could have been upkept better during this transition.

D5. We appreciate the workers' patience and cooperation, and will continue to improve the conditions for the residents of the dormitories.

D6 I would like to assure Singaporeans that MOM is coordinating efforts to ensure that the needs and well-being of our foreign workers residing at both dormitories are well taken care of.

D7. Workers that had close contact with the confirmed cases have already been separately quarantined. MOH has also set up medical posts on-site to assess and treat workers who are unwell. They will be relocated and housed separately from their usual room-mates.

D8. This is an unprecedented incident that the Government is managing, and MOM officers and our partner NGO, the Migrant Worker Centre, have been working round-the-clock with the dormitory operators and our partners to prioritise the well-being of workers who remain healthy.

D9. This includes ensuring the timely supply of food and stepping up hygiene management, as a result of extended hours of stay by the workers in the dormitories.

D10. Minister Iswaran, MP Murali and I visited Westlite Papan dormitory last weekend to assure our foreign workers that these heightened measures for safe distancing are to protect everyone and that we will do our best to work with employers to take care of their welfare.

D11. I had also visited Sungei Tengah Lodge dormitory, on the same evening as MOH announced that a Covid-19 cluster was found in the dormitory. Understandably, they were anxious to know what arrangements would be made to protect them. Top of their concerns was whether they would continue to get paid. Second, what measures will the dorms put in place to ensure their safety and protection. They too have families at home who depend on their salaries here.

D12. With DPM Heng's announcement of the foreign worker levy waiver and rebate measures, we can now give our foreign workers greater assurance that their employers should be able to continue to pay for their salaries, provide accommodation and food. I strongly urge employers to pass the Budget support to their workers and help us keep them cared for and motivated during this period.

E. Conclusion

E1. Our SEPs, lower-wage workers and foreign workers play an important role in our economy and in building our nation. In this uncertain period, it is important that we provide them with greater certainty and support. The MOM will help them overcome this difficult period, so that we can all emerge stronger after this crisis.

P1. Mr. Speaker, allow me to share how we will support workers and employers in Malay.

F. Pengenalan

F1. Jumaat lalu, Perdana Menteri telah berkongsi mengenai keadaan COVID-19 di Singapura. Kita terpaksa membuat keputusan yang sukar untuk melaksanakan langkah-langkah jaga jarak yang selamat selama sebulan untuk bertindak sebagai "pemutus litar".

F2. Penutupan sementara kebanyakan tempat kerja, kecuali perkhidmatan penting dan sektor ekonomi utama, berkuat kuasa hari ini. Ia akan memberi kesan ke atas pekerja dan perniagaan kita.

F3. Kita teguh dalam perpaduan dengan perniagaan dan pekerja dan akan mengharungi cabaran ini bersama-sama.

G. Melindungi Mata Pencarian Pekerja

G1. Keutamaan kita adalah melindungi mata pencarian pekerja kita.

G2. Skim Bantuan Pekerjaan (JSS) yang dipertingkat akan membantu perniagaan mengekalkan dan membayar pekerja mereka.

G3. Dengan jaminan JSS yang dipertingkat, kami menggesa mereka supaya menyampaikan dengan jelas kepada pekerja mereka mengenai situasi pekerjaan mereka dan pengaturan gaji bagi beberapa minggu akan datang.

G4. Seperti yang saya telah kongsi dalam ucapan bahasa Inggeris saya, kami akan memastikan agar segmen pekerja yang mudah terjejas, seperti orang bekerja sendiri dan pekerja berpendapatan rendah, mendapat bantuan yang luas untuk mengharungi tempoh ini.

H. Membantu Individu Bekerja Sendiri (SEP)

Bantuan Pendapatan untuk SEP

H1. Skim Bantuan Pendapatan SEP (SIRS) akan menyediakan bantuan wang tunai secara langsung kepada SEP (individu yang bekerja sendiri) yang kurang kemampuan dan sokongan keluarga.

H2. SEP rakyat Singapura yang layak akan menerima pembayaran tunai suku tahunan sebanyak \$3,000 setiap satu, atau \$9,000 sepenuhnya. Kami menjangkakan SIRS memberi manfaat secara automatik kepada sekitar 100,000 SEP.

H3. SIRS akan diberi kepada SEP yang benar-benar mempunyai keperluan. Kebanyakan SEP tidak perlu daftarkan diri.

Bantuan Latihan untuk SEP meningkatkan kemahiran

H4. Kami juga akan membantu SEP dalam usaha latihan mereka. Skim Bantuan Latihan SEP (STSS) yang baharu menyediakan elaun latihan untuk SEP yang mengikuti kursus Siri SkillsFuture dan program latihan lain yang dipilih.

H5. Ini akan membantu membiayai perbelanjaan harian SEP. STSS telah dilanjutkan sehingga penghujung tahun, dan elaun latihan setiap jam dinaikkan daripada \$7.50 kepada \$10, berkuat kuasa dari 1 Mei 2020. Tidak ada had berapa banyak latihan boleh didaftarkan oleh SEP. Misalnya seseorang SEP, seperti freelancers, pemandu teksi atau kereta sewa, yang mungkin mempunyai masa dalam tempoh ini, jika mereka mengambil kursus selama 4 jam setengah hari, mereka boleh mendapat elaun \$40 sehari. Apa yang penting adalah seseorang SEP itu dapat meningkatkan kemahiran dan membuka peluang baru dalam pekerjaan atau perniagaannya.

I. Membantu Pekerja Berpendapatan Rendah Kita

I1. Kami juga akan membantu pekerja kita yang berpendapatan rendah. Mereka akan menerima Workfare Special Payment (Pembayaran Khas Daya Kerja) sebanyak \$3,000, sepenuhnya berupa wang tunai yang diberi dalam dua bahagian. Tambahan Workfare Special Payment juga telah dipertingkat, dengan had pendapatan yang layak dan pembayaran tahunan maksimum dinaikkan sejak Januari 2020.

I2. Kami juga telah menguatkan lagi bantuan untuk mereka yang majikannya tidak dapat membayar gaji mereka kerana kesulitan kewangan atau kegagalan perniagaan.

I3. Bersama bantuan kewangan segera daripada Temporary Relief Fund (Dana Bantuan Sementara), Covid-19 Special Grant (Geran Bantuan COVID-19), serta bantuan lain daripada Care and Support Package (Pakej Bantuan Keluarga) yang dipertingkat seperti baucar barangan dapur, rebat bayaran perkhidmatan dan penyenggaraan, kami akan membantu SEP dan pekerja bergaji rendah kita melalui krisis ini.

J. Memudahkan pekerja kita mendapat pekerjaan

J1. Ada di antara kita, mungkin menghadapi kesusahan untuk mendapat pekerjaan dalam pasaran pekerjaan yang sukar ini oleh kerana situasi Covid-19.

J2. Pemerintah memahami keadaan dan akan sediakan bantuan untuk mereka yang mencari kerja. Pemerintah akan secara aktif memudahkan pepadanan pencari kerja dengan firma yang mempunyai kerja kosong segera dalam

tempoh ini, sama ada untuk pekerjaan baru, atau pekerjaan kedua untuk menambah pendapatan.

J3. Inisiatif Pekerjaan SGUnited akan mewujudkan kira-kira 10,000 pekerjaan dalam tempoh satu tahun akan datang dalam sektor awam dan swasta.

a. Dalam masa ini, apabila amalan jaga jarak yang selamat begitu penting, pameran pekerjaan perlu mengambil bentuk yang berbeza juga – dengan menggunakan teknologi virtual.

b. SGUnited Jobs Virtual Career Fair yang pertama sedang berlangsung sekarang. Sehingga 2 April, terdapat kira-kira 3,900 kerja kosong, dan lebih daripada 5,400 pencari kerja telah memohon bagi Pekerjaan SGUnited. Kami telah mendapat minat yang baik daripada majikan dan akan terus membesarkan kumpulan pekerjaan yang segera tersedia.

J4. Rangkaian M3 juga memainkan peranan penting dalam membantu masyarakat. Melalui dua pameran kerjaya di alam maya atau “virtual” yang dianjurkan pada Mac dan April, MENDAKI SENSE telah menerima lebih 700 permohonan kerja, dan akan memudahkan penempatan kerja.

J5. Baru-baru ini, MENDAKI SENSE melancarkan talian bantuan khusus untuk mereka yang memerlukan bantuan dalam menggunakan portal dalam talian. MENDAKI SENSE juga akan membantu mereka untuk mencari kerja melalui aplikasi CariKerja dan akan terus mengongsi maklumat tentang jawatan kosong dari pelbagai inisiatif, termasuk Inisiatif Pekerjaan SGUnited.

J6. MENDAKI SENSE dan badan-badan bantu diri yang lain sedang bekerjasama dengan agensi pemerintah seperti EDB dan ESG untuk menghubungkan mereka yang sedang mencari kerja, dengan syarikat yang ingin mengisi jawatan kosong ekoran COVID-19.

J7. Di kalangan pencari kerja kita, kami sangat prihatin terhadap kohort yang bakal lulus daripada ITE, politeknik dan universiti kita. Masanya memang sukar bagi memasuki pasaran pekerjaan.

J8. Program Latihan Sambil Bekerja SGUnited akan menyediakan bantuan kepada majikan untuk menawarkan latihan sambil bekerja bagi para lulusan baru. Latihan sambil bekerja ini akan membantu graduan ITE, politeknik and universiti - pencari kerja kali pertama - mengembangkan kemahiran mereka secara profesional dan meningkatkan keupayaan mereka mendapat pekerjaan.

K. Membantu Daya Maju Perniagaan dalam Jangka Terdekat

K1. Demi membantu pekerja kita dengan lebih baik, kita perlu membantu syarikat kita mengatasi cabaran-cabaran terdekat. Selain daripada bantuan yang sangat penting melalui JSS, Pemerintah akan membantu dari segi kos perniagaan lain dan memudahkan aliran tunai.

K2. Sebagai contoh, MOM akan mengetepikan levi pekerja asing pada bulan April, dan memberi rebat berjumlah \$750 atas levi yang telah dibayar, untuk sekali sahaja. SME akan diberi tiga bulan tambahan untuk membuat pembayaran levi pekerja asing. Akhir sekali, Pemerintah akan membantu perniagaan dalam mendapatkan kredit.

K3. Rakan-rakan seperti persatuan perdagangan dan dewan perniagaan juga memainkan peranan penting dalam membantu perusahaan. Badan perniagaan seperti Dewan Perniagaan dan Perusahaan Melayu Singapura (SMCCI) telah menubuhkan pasukan bertindak untuk meneroka bagaimana anggotanya boleh memanfaatkan sepenuhnya inisiatif dalam Belanjawan Perpaduan, Berdaya Tahan, dan Kesepakatan.

K4. Mereka juga menubuhkan talian ‘hotline’ bagi anggota yang ingin mendapatkan bantuan khusus, dan akan menganjurkan sesi perbincangan untuk memahami kebimbangan anggota mereka, serta meneroka cara terbaik untuk SMCCI membantu mereka. SMCCI juga akan memudahkan sesi perbincangan antara anggotanya dengan pihak-pihak berkepentingan, termasuk tuan tanah.

K5. Tetapi walaupun dalam masa-masa yang sukar ini, perusahaan masih tetap menyumbang kepada masyarakat. Di bawah Pasukan Bertindak SGTeguhBersatu, SMCCI akan berkolaborasi dengan sukarelawan masyarakat supaya golongan yang memerlukan, seperti warga emas yang tinggal berseorangan, masih boleh mendapatkan makanan. Semangat gotong royong inilah yang akan membantu kita mengharungi segala kesusahan.

K6. Membantu perniagaan agar dapat mengharungi tempoh mencabar ini pula akan memastikan pekerja kita terus mempunyai pekerjaan.

L. Kesimpulan

L1. Pada masa yang sukar ini, kami sedang membantu rakyat Singapura agar terus mempunyai pekerjaan. Kami akan memberi perhatian khusus kepada SEP dan pekerja bergaji rendah kita. Bagi mereka yang sedang mencari pekerjaan, kami akan bantu memudahkan mereka mendapat pekerjaan. Perniagaan dan pekerja sama-sama boleh menggunakan masa ini untuk menyesuaikan diri - perniagaan dapat merubah, dan rakyat Singapura dapat meningkatkan kemahiran kita.

L2. Beban kita mungkin berat, tetapi kita akan memikulnya bersama, dan muncul lebih kuat daripada pengalaman ini.

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