

In addition, the Government has provided S\$23 million under the 2nd Off-Budget package to beef up CareerLink network. The Manpower Ministry has also extended its CareerLink, to 13 grassroots organisations. These organisations include the five ethnic-based self help bodies, the five community development councils, the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), the Singapore Professionals' and Executives' Cooperative and the Singapore National Employers Federation. Through this network, these organisations will get funding from the ministry to run and extend their own job-placement and employment-related programmes. They can also tap the ministry's other job-related services, such as its national job bank.

Organise job fairs

The Ministry has set up a series of community based job fairs to bring together job seekers and employers. From Jan 2002 to Dec 2002, the Manpower Ministry will be jointly organising a series of Community Job Fairs with the Community Development Councils. These job fairs serve as a convenient meeting place for employers and job seekers. There will be 15 – 20 companies from different sectors taking part in each which is expected to attract about 3,000.

Help for older workers

Many retrenched workers will find that the jobs which they are used to will no longer be available in Singapore even after the economy recovers. This is especially so for older and less educated workers previously engaged in the manufacturing sector. To stay employed, some of them will have to switch to other industries especially those in the services sector.

Making this change requires openness and flexibility on the part of both workers and employers. Workers will have to make some adjustments and accept different job requirements and work environments. Employers on their part must also be more prepared to hire such mid-career workers who are newcomers to the industry and ease them into their new jobs.

To help older workers with low education make the adjustment, MOM has piloted a new programme called the "People for Jobs" Traineeship Programme. The programme is akin to an apprentice programme for mid-career workers.

From the 2nd off-budget measures, S\$200 million has been allocated to provide more support for companies hiring workers 40 years and above, under the People for Jobs Traineeship Programme. This will pay for 20,000 Traineeship places.

What is Jobs Traineeship Programme?

The Ministry of Manpower introduced this as a pilot programme in June. It is a vocational conversion programme for older workers, that seeks to help unemployed workers aged 40 and above to make career transitions. Companies participating in the programme set up traineeship/ mentorship arrangements to help newly recruited older workers to fit into the new jobs and work environment. For each unemployed older worker that the participating company successfully places, the company receives 50% wage support per month, up to a maximum of S\$600, for 3 months.

With the 2nd off-budget measure, the enhanced programme of S\$200 million set aside will raise the ceiling on the 50% wage support from S\$600 to S\$2,000. The enhanced programme will hence cover skilled workers and management staff as well and the enhanced programme will give the wage support for 6 months instead of 3 months, for all recipients. The enhanced programme will run for 1 year, starting 1 November 2001.

3.2 Role of the Community Development Councils

When comes to job searching and job matching, there has been an increased in the number of such activities by the five local community development councils (CDCs). The Government wanted to strengthen CDCs to become job-matching agencies at the local level. On the national level, the Government would continue to attract investments and restructure the economy and put in place policies to create new jobs.

Each of the CDC is headed by a mayor who was selected to put on the task for matching unemployed residents to the right job and to change their mindsets. The five mayors will also work together with National Trades Union Congress on training job-placement officers and to get job-matching support. In addition, some of the mayors also try to form corporate-relations committee with factories and companies in the area.

The services offered to the unemployed residents by the CDCs include the following:

1) Job matching services

The CDCs have joined the Manpower Ministry's CareerLink Associate Programme to provide employment and training-related services to job seekers. The CDCs are also linked to the Manpower Ministry's LabourNet System (an on-line electronic system to provide services to the Ministry's customers) to offer job-matching services.

In addition, besides working together with the Manpower Ministry, some of the CDCs have also created their own job database. One such example is called the *Job Connect*.

Job Connect

Job Connect is a job matching/ placement unit set up to try to connect the retrenched to job opportunities within the Northwest CDC district.

- The CDC will survey and knock on the doors of all business establishments within the district to source for job vacancies, and to create a job database. These jobs might not be available through Manpower Ministry job database because these jobs will largely be smaller companies.
- Target employers include:
 - Shops and shopping centres in the neighbourhood
 - Government institutions – town councils/ schools
 - Service industry – petrol stations/ coffee shops/ restaurants
 - Factories and industrial parks
- The CDC will set up several service centres with computer terminals, at various parts of the district. This is to facilitate residents to check for job vacancies available from the computer terminals and at the same time register themselves for job matching service. Officers will be on-site to help residents to fill up application forms and at the same time offer advisory and counselling service, particularly on job expectations.
- The CDC will pre-screen applicants before submitting the list of applicants to the respective companies for selection
- Once the companies have short-listed the applicants, interviews can be arranged at the premise of the town council

Other CDCs have also made use of technology to facilitate job-matching exercise. One such example is the use of Short Messaging Services (SMS) and e-mail initiated by Southwest CDC.

e-Job Matching SMS System

- Job seekers register their particulars on the CDC's website
- CDCs will match job seekers' profile to the jobs available
- Once there is a match, CDCs will SMS and e-mail job seeker
- Job seekers are sent a list of jobs they qualify for by SMS and e-mail every week
- Potential employers will also receive a list of people qualified for the job via SMS and e-mail.

This e job-messaging alert is done on top of the usual email alerts



Thus far, job-matching services provided by the CDCs have been successful. It offers jobseekers alternative avenues from newspaper and employment agencies to look for job. Through this job matching service, some of the residents are able to find job within two to four days after registration.

2) Training and skills upgrading

The CDCs provide not only job matching services but also training and skills upgrading courses, such as computer and language classes. Some of the training courses are offered free to the unemployed, for example, training to be cleaners.

Training to be cleaners

- Free training for unemployed Singaporeans to be cleaners
- They will be trained over eight days in laundry care, home hygiene, cleaning techniques and the basics of using different detergents and chemicals for various cleaning jobs
- Course fee of S\$520 is fully sponsored by the CDC
- The CDC will also offer job-matching service after the trainee has completed the course



3) Community Job Fairs

To facilitate employment process, the CDC also jointly organise community job fairs with the Manpower Ministry on a regular basis for local job seekers. Employers from the various sectors will be at the fairs to promote their job openings and recruit suitable candidates.

4) Career Counselling

Another important role that the CDCs are playing is the role of counselling. In view that certain jobs lost may never be regained, there is a need to change the mindset of the people. Hence most of the CDCs offer career advisory and counselling service for their residents looking for jobs.

3.3 Role of labour union

Singapore's national labour union – National Trades and Union Congress (NTUC), have a major role to play in handling the unemployment issue.

One of the services that the union has provided is to work together with union companies in such a way that these companies will inform NTUC whenever there are vacancies at their companies. NTUC will add the information to the national job bank, such that the unemployed will be able to find out about employment vacancies more quickly. Companies will also save on advertising costs. Hence it is kind of a free service to the companies and to the workers who need jobs.

From February 2002, NTUC has also set up a job placement services for its members, known as the **NTUC JobLink Centre**, which aims to match job-seekers with one of the over 6,000 jobs that are available.

The centre, which costs S\$200,000 to set up and taps into three job networks – Manpower Ministry's CareerLink portal, AsiaOne careers portal, and 1,000 unionised companies. Full-time officers with industrial relations experience will be on site to explain the job-market situation and help the worker choose realistic jobs.

3.4 Special Task Force

A Jobs Task Force has been set up to co-ordinate and help workers who have been laid off get back to work. It is chaired by the Minister of State (Education and Manpower) and will comprise other high level representatives from the employers, unions and government. This special task force is elevated from the previous Employment Task Force organized by the NTUC which was set up to study where the jobs are, match job-seekers to jobs, and look for new ways to help those who have been retrenched. Many of the recommendations made by the Employment Task Force were included in the 2nd Off-Budget package.

The mandate of this Jobs Task Force is to monitor the implementation of existing measures, suggest enhancements to these measures and recommend appropriate new measures in the following areas:

- Saving existing jobs and facilitating new job opportunities for Singaporeans
- Enhancing job matching assistance services for unemployed Singaporeans
- Stepping up the training of workers and unemployed Singaporeans; and
- Improving the dissemination of information on jobs, training and assistance schemes for the unemployed.

Four focus groups are set up to review and study the specific measures in each of the four areas in greater details.

One of the immediate tasks for the Jobs Task Force is to identify growth sectors and to retrain Singaporeans to find jobs in such growth sectors. One such sector is the aerospace industry. The aerospace industry has grown despite the recession and it needs 1,500 skilled workers over the next three years. Hence the Singapore Economic Development Board will provide training for laid-off workers to work in aerospace companies. These workers will attend a three-month course with course fees fully funded by the Ministry of Manpower. In addition, the trainees will receive training allowance during the course.

According to the Jobs Task Force, the crux of the unemployment problem is not just shortage of jobs, but there are not enough workers who are willing to fill vacant positions. It feels that mindset-switch is necessary both at the workers level and at the company level. Workers, either for low-skilled and skilled or those seeking executive –level positions, are urged to be realistic on job hunt and to switch into other industry such as marine, health care and hotel in which jobs are aplenty (see table 5). Employers are also told to be more understanding to workers making a career switch.

Table 5: Vacancies available¹⁸

Growth sectors	
Manufacturing sector	<u>Marine industry</u> - in view of anticipated increase in ship-repairing activities
Biomedical sciences industry	<u>Biomedical sciences industry</u> - outlook for the biomedical sciences industry remains positive
Services sector	Health-care, education, social and community service industries - these industries are expected to grow due to ageing Singapore population and the Governments' continued emphasis on education

¹⁸ Source: *Vacancies up for grabs*, the Singapore Straits Times, 4 March 2002

Jobs Available	
Jobs for low-skilled workers	<u>Health-care industry</u> - Ambulance attendants and healthcare assistants <u>Restaurant and retail industry</u> - Waiters and shop assistants <u>Transport and logistics sectors</u> - Drivers, vehicle mechanics and warehouse assistants
Jobs for skilled workers	- Laboratory technicians - Electronics - Mechanics - Welders - Pipe fitters
Executive-level jobs	- Teachers - Health professionals - Nurses - IT personnel - Engineers

Given the cold response to jobs available in the marine industry, healthcare industry and the hotel industry, the Jobs Task Force will be conducting a campaign to find out why the vacancies are short of takers and that it will be taking action to make these jobs more appealing. A similar transformation has been made to the cleaning industry to make the cleaning jobs more appealing to people.

Cleaning Industry Transformation Plan¹⁹

The Cleaning Industry Transformation Plan is an attempt at redefining and professionalising the Cleaning Industry. The plan was developed jointly by the Ministry of Manpower, the Environmental Management Association of Singapore (EMAS), the Productivity and Standards Board (PSB), cleaning service providers, building owners and suppliers.

¹⁹ Source: *Cleaning Industry Transformation Plan*, Ministry of Manpower, <http://www.gov.sg/mom/mandev/citp/citp.htm>

Initiatives in the plan will help the cleaning industry embrace best practices, modernise, and leverage on technology and automation to achieve higher productivity. The objective is to transform the industry from one that requires significant numbers of low-skilled workers to one that requires less numbers of workers, but who will be highly-skilled, motivated and better paid.

A Centre for Cleaning Technology was set up in February 2001 to train workers in cleaning skills and certifies them under the National Skills Recognition System. This hence created an industry-wide recognition of skills and workers can therefore able to command better pay and better job prospects.

3.5 Education and Training

To cater to the needs of people with different educational levels, different types of training incentives are available.

Education incentives for the blue-collar workers

Skills Development Fund

The Government has placed very high emphasis on skills learning and re-training; as it has regard training is the key to Singapore's vision to have a world-class work force. In 1979, the Government has set up the Skills Development Fund (SDF)²⁰ to provide incentive grants for training those in the workforce, those preparing to join the workforce, and those re-turning the workforce. The SDF's focus is worker²¹ training. The grants are financed by collections from the Skills Development levy imposed on employers with workers earning \$1,500 or less a month. The current levy rate is 1%. Grants are awarded on the basis of a cost-sharing principle and the training must be relevant to the economic development of Singapore. The amount of SDF grants that a company can obtain is not tied to the levy contribution.

²⁰ The Fund is administered under the Singapore Productivity and Standards Board
<http://www.psb.gov.sg/assistance/sdf.html>

²¹ Workers are defined as employees who earn \$1,500 & below and / or have 'A' level qualifications & below

Under the 2nd Off-budget package, the Government has contributed S\$500 million top-up to the SDF and in addition, the SDF will support 90% of the fees for certifiable skills training from courses, for 1 year starting from 1 November 2001 (the usual course fee support is 80%).

Skills Redevelopment Programme

The Skills Re-development Programme (SRP), initiated by the National Trades Union Congress, aims to help the older and lower-skilled workers to undergo the training to enhance their employability and minimise structural employment caused by the mismatch of skills needed for the new jobs.

A summary of the list of programmes to help the blue-collar workers or to those with little education, are listed in the tables below (see table 6 and table 7):

Table 6: For basic and enabling skills training

Programme	Description	Funding Support
National IT Literacy Programme (NITLP)	Equips senior citizens, housewives, and workers with basic IT skills (e.g. knowledge of PCs and Windows environment) and Internet Skills (e.g. electronic mailing, online transaction and internet surfing)	Support of up to 80% of course fees, capped at S\$8 per trainee-hour.
Basic Education for Skills training (BEST) Programme	Designed for working adults to acquire a basic education in English Language and Mathematics up to Primary School Leaving Exam level Certificate-in-BEST awarded upon successful completion of the end-of-module exams.	Support of 50% to 100% of course fees. Individuals pay up to S\$7.50 per module
Worker Improvement through Secondary Education (WISE) Programme	Aims to upgrade the education level of working adults up to GCE 'N' level in English Language and Mathematics Certificate-in-WISE awarded upon successful completion of the end-of-module exam for Modules 1,2 & 3. Module 4 students will sit for GCE 'N' level exam if they pass Module 3 exam	Support of 50% to 100% of course fees. Individuals pay up to S\$12.50 per module
Critical Enabling Skills Training (CREST)	Equips individuals with 7 critical skills needed to enhance their employability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning-to-learn - Literacy - Listening and Oral Communication - Problem Solving and Creativity - Personal Effectiveness - Group Effectiveness - Organisational Effectiveness and Leadership Modular certificate awarded for every completed module and a full certificate awarded upon completion of all 7 modules	<u>Under NTUC</u> Support of up to 90% of course fees (with support from N-ETF and SDF) *Union members pay \$30 per person per module *Non-union members pay \$300 per person per module <u>Under Central CDC</u> Support of 90% * Individual pays \$9.20 - \$11.30 per module
Infocomm Competency Programme (ICP)	Aims to enhance the competitiveness of the workforce with infocomm skills and knowledge that will increase work productivity. Equips self-sponsored individuals/workers with infocomm skills to their employability.	<u>Certifiable courses</u> Support of up to 80% of course fees, capped at \$8 per trainee-hour. <u>Broad-based courses</u> Support of \$2.50 per trainee-hour

Work Skills Training Programme (WSTP)	<p>Equips adults with the basic labour market skills (e.g. knowledge in career planning and job search) to enable them to be self-reliant and efficient in coping with job changes.</p> <p>Includes the following: Labour market trends, job and wage outlook, self assessment, identifying suitable jobs Resume writing and interview techniques Managing the emotions and financial aspects of job changes</p>	<p>Support of 80% of course fees, capped at S\$15 per trainee-hour, whichever is lower. Support of 100% of course fees for the retrenched/unemployed, capped at S\$15 per trainee-hour, whichever is lower</p>
NTUC Education and Training Fund (N-ETF)²²	<p>Aims to assist union members who are keen to undertake training and upgrading on their own. Courses eligible for funding in this category include CREST, Fast Forward²³ and IT courses</p>	<p>Support of 10% of course fees. In addition, NTUC will assist union members in applying for SDF support of up to 80% of course fees</p>

Table 7: For job specific training for workers

Scheme	Description	Funding Support
Skills Redevelopment Programme (SRP) (Surrogate Employers Scheme)	<p>Aims to assist less-educated and lower-skilled individuals to pick up certifiable skills with support from surrogate employers</p> <p>Courses eligible for funding are available in industries such as banking, childcare, healthcare, hotel manufacturing, telecommunications, travel and tourism</p> <p>Courses lead to certifications such as NTC-3, NTC-2, ITC, CoC, NSC-3, NSC-2, NSC-1, Certificates and Diplomas from the various polytechnics</p>	<p><u>Course Fees Support</u> Workers aged below 40 90% or S\$10 per trainee-hour, whichever is lower by SDF, 5% by the Government, remaining 5% to be co-shared between the trainee and surrogate employer Workers aged 40 and above 100% or S\$20 per trainee-hour, whichever is lower *Individuals pay up to S\$2,500</p> <p><u>Training Allowance</u> Part-time Training Trainees receive S\$5.70 per trainee-hour</p> <p><u>Full-time Training</u> Trainees receive 75% of last drawn salary or S\$1,000 per month whichever is lower, subject to a minimum of S\$600 per month (Training allowance is applicable only for unemployed individuals whose training allowance is co-sponsored by the surrogate employers)</p>
NTUC Education and Training Fund	<p>Aims to assist union members who are keen to undertake training and upgrading on their own. Courses eligible for funding support in this category lead to certifications such as CoC, NTC-3, NTC-2, ITC, industry certificates and certificates from the various polytechnic</p>	<p>Support of 10% of course fees. In addition, NTUC will assist union members in applying for SDF support of up to 80% of course fees</p>

²²The N-ETF is an endowment fund with S\$40 million, comprising S\$10 million raised by the labor movement and a 3-to-1 matching from the Government. Earnings from the fund are used to support the training of union members in approved courses. It was set up the NTUC in October 1998.

²³ FAST FORWARD is the national televideo training programme for workers with little time for training. FAST FORWARD seeks to quickly provide workers with all the basic skills such as basic English language and mathematics, and selling techniques for workplace effectiveness through its eight training courses:

Concerning the other group of workers who are also vulnerable to job losses, the Government has also set up a number of programmes for the white-collared workers. For example, the Manpower Ministry has worked with the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore on the **Strategic Manpower Conversion Programme (SMCP)**²⁴ to help executives and professional make a career transition to the Infocomm sector. This programme provides funding support for employers who send existing employees or newly recruited staff for conversion training in IT. The programme also has a *Facilitator Scheme* for individuals who have not been able to secure employment yet and hence are not able to obtain employers' funding support. Facilitators will assess the suitability of these candidates and register them for the conversion courses. They will also help to place trainees with suitable employers upon the completion of the course.

Other training programmes for the white-collared workers are listed in table 6 below (see table 8). As noted, as the white-collared workers are mostly degree and diploma holders who do not lack basic skills and hence the training programmes are thus more focused.

Table 8: Job specific training for professionals and executives

Programme	Description	Funding Support
Strategic Manpower Conversion Programme (infocomm) Facilitator Scheme - SMCP (Infocomm) Facilitator Scheme	Aims to equip executives and professionals with new skills for deployment in new growth sectors. The programme is available for the infocomm sector.	Support of up to 50% of course fees, capped at S\$4,000 per trainee per programme.
Critical Infocomm Technology Resource Programme (CITREP)	This programme will help to accelerate the development of emerging, critical and specialized IT skills required by companies. Relevant training programmes that impart knowledge and skills in these technologies will be evaluated and endorsed under CITREP.	Support of up to 70% of course and examination fees (if any), capped at \$2,500 per trainee. Excluding GST
E-Business Savviness Programme (EBSP)	Aims to equip non-infocomm professionals with e-business skills and knowledge	Support of up to 50% of course fees, capped at S\$2,000 per trainee.
NTUC Education and Training Fund	Aims to assist union members who are keen to undertake training and upgrading on their own Courses available for funding in this category lead to industry certifications and certificates and diplomas from the various polytechnics	Support of 10% of course fees In addition, NTUC will assist union members in applying for SDF support of up to 80% of course fees

²⁴ Reference: <http://www.ida.gov.sg/Website/IDAhome.nsf/Home?OpenForm>

3.6 Foreign talent rule

Foreign workers and talents are necessary to see through Singapore's growth continuity. They help to fill the gaps in the local economy because Singapore is too small to have sufficient number of talents required by the MNCs. And because of the assurance of the continuity of foreign talents available, the MNCs would then be comfortable to have set up their operations in Singapore, and hence create jobs for the locals.

In addition, according to a report by Political and Economic Risk Consultancy, Ltd (PERC), it said that Singapore should keep the foreign-talent policy, as it will give Singapore an economic edge. It suggested that the Government should continue to aggressively attract foreign talent in order to improve the competitive position of local companies.

Although some Singaporeans may feel threatened by the job squeeze from the foreigners, the Government is not relenting on its policy to limit the number of foreigners working in Singapore. In the 2nd off budget measure, the only measure that concerns foreign workers is that criteria for foreign talent have been tightened.

Foreign Talent Criteria

Criteria tightened for foreign talent and workers from Dec 1 2001. Minimum salary to qualify for employment pass raised from S\$2,000 to S\$2,500. Higher qualifying standards for work-permit holders to ensure more have NTC-3 (practical) qualifications or have completed at least secondary-school education

3.7 Acceleration of infrastructure projects

As of the 2nd Off-Budget package, some infrastructure projects have been brought forward to help boost economy and to create more jobs. Examples of such infrastructure are the building of schools, junior colleges, road works, and public transportation systems. In total, accelerating these projects will inject some S\$3.5 billion into the economy, with S\$280 million coming on-stream in FY2001, S\$1.1 billion in FY 2002 and S\$2.1 billion in FY2003. The timing of these projects has to be right; otherwise the construction sector will be overheated when the economy picks up.

3.8 Other existing measures

Besides the current job matching, skills training and job creation programmes, the Government has also encourage companies to implement alternative ways of working to save cost and not to decrease employees morale. One such example is the flexi-hour plan. Most of the Government ministries have implemented the flexible work arrangements, that is, full-time employees can choose their starting and stopping times, within the limits set by management.

By staggering the working hours of employees, employers can exercise flexibility to arrange their work patterns to suit to their business requirements, with the total contractual hours not exceeding 44 hours a week, as stipulated in the Employment Act.

In a similar sense, the telecommuting also serves similar benefit such as savings on travelling time.

Other ways of helping companies to cut cost and to decrease unemployment are putting workers on voluntary pay cuts, implementing shorter workweeks, making use of the *Skills Redevelopment Programme* and to send redundant workers for skills upgrading.

3.9 Measures by self help group

The Singapore Human Resources Institute, a non-profit organisation, set up a Singapore Professionals' and Executives' Co-operative (SPEC) to support Singapore's executives and professionals through tough times. Spec was set up to provide support for workers not protected by the existing Employment Act, who includes non-unionised workers, executives and the self-employed. It also help unemployed members get jobs, and encourage co-operation and networking between members. Members join the co-operative by paying S\$1per share for a minimum of 50 and can also seek financial and legal advice and to insure against the loss of their jobs. One of the core benefits for SPEC members is the insurance coverage provided by SPEC. Other than the usual medical and personal protection benefits, SPEC members can opt for a lifeline of S\$1,500 cash a month for up to three months should members lost their jobs. Members only pay an annual premium of about S\$110 per year.

3.10 Establishments of trade pacts

The fervent pursuance of bilateral Free Trade Agreements by Singapore, will certainly bring about more job opportunities. According to local news, Singapore's trade pact with the US could bring about 50,000 new jobs in Singapore²⁵.

4. CONCLUSION

In tackling the unemployment issue, the Government of Singapore is trying to resolve the problem with a number of job-training programmes. In addition, job-matching services have been intensified at the local level while efforts to encourage investments and to create new jobs continued at the national level. Unemployment is expected to worsen in the first half of the year, and with almost no new jobs created and new graduates are coming into the job market.

The Government emphasis on life long learning and its strong financial support to both the workers and the companies is commendable. A majority of the courses under the Skills Development Fund are in fact caters to the needs of the knowledge-based economy that Singapore is moving into. However, Singapore should not neglect the over age 40 group of the population, especially the less-educated group. These are the group of workers that compete more intensely with the low-skilled foreign labour. Despite the age over 40 group of workers undergoing re-training, companies would tend to employ foreign labour as these foreign workers are more willing to receive lower wages.

White-collar workers are by no means immune to the retrenchment exercise as well, and in fact the impending retrenchment exercise will affect them the most, due to corporate restructuring plans. However, from the list of measures available, especially skills re-training programmes, it seems that the Government extends more help to the low-skilled cohort.

It could probably be that the difficulties experienced by the executives and professionals are temporary, and once the economy recovers, they will be the first to be re-employed compared to the low-skilled counterparts. In addition, professionals and executives and graduates who are equipped with knowledge and skills, is believed to be able to look for employment or business opportunities.

²⁵ Source: William Choong, *US-S'pore trade pact could create 50,000 jobs*, Singapore Straits Times, 23 March 2002

Another key characteristic of the Singapore effort in handling the unemployment issue is the intensification of the job-match service at the local level. Community development councils, national labour unions and other self-help groups were seen actively promoting job-match with innovative ideas such as via short-messaging service. The handling of such job-matching issue does not rest solely in the hands of the Manpower Ministry, but instead it is delegated to the local community organisations, which have closer interactions with the residents, which in turn, will have greater impact when comes to counselling work.

Much effort has been put in by the local community organisations to help change the mindset of the unemployed residents that jobs that are lost cannot be regained and to accept jobs from different industry.

At the same time, the Government, through the Jobs Task Force, is looking for ways to match unappealing jobs that are aplenty, to the jobless.

In short, in dealing with the current unemployment issue, there is no obvious effort to implement 'surrogate' safety nets. The Government would rather offer assistance to facilitate job opportunities, and at the same time provide short-term relief such as utilities rebates and financial assistance to take care of living needs such as housing and education temporarily. Amid the stringent criteria for foreign labour, the batch that will be entering Singapore will be of higher calibre who are much needed in jobs such as biomedical sciences that require specialised skills, and where local talent is lacking. Hence Singaporeans need to upgrade themselves so as not to compound the problem of structural unemployment resulting from mismatch between job seekers and job supply.

And of course, the establishment of bilateral free trade agreements would definitely bring about an increase in job openings, resulting from liberalization of some industries. Some of the key industries include the financial, Internet Technology and the life sciences industry. However on the other hand, these new jobs that are brought about might not be familiar to the locals. Hence, ultimately skills-retraining and upgrading is the key to keep oneself employable. The Government will only facilitate job opportunities.

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