

Singapore Well Placed To Tackle World Crisis

By **Ng Eng Kie in Geneva**
Principal Special Representative,
International Affairs Department

The search for effective responses to the current world economic and social crisis dominated the agenda of the 98th Session of the International Labour Conference which started on 3 June 2009 and concluded on 16 June 2009. The annual tripartite conference in Geneva, Switzerland, is attended by over 4,000 government, worker and employer representatives from the International Labour Organization's 182 member states.

The highlight of the conference was the ILO Summit on the Global Jobs Crisis. Many Heads of State, Government and leaders from employers' and workers' organisations came to Geneva to share and discuss policies that had been implemented at the national and international level to address the global jobs crisis.

There were also four high-level panels which discussed global and regional coordination, development cooperation, fundamental principles and rights at work, social dialogue and enterprise survival in times of crisis. A new draft labour standard on HIV/AIDS; the world of work and the state of gender equality in the context of globalisation were also discussed.

NTUC Secretary-General Lim Swee Say, NTUC President John De Payva and Director of NTUC

International Affairs Department Yeo Khee Leng took the opportunity to meet with 12 overseas unions and international labour organisations to exchange experiences on responses to the crisis and further bilateral relationships. Many countries reported a spike in unemployment as a result of massive plant closures.

The general sentiment was that the recession would be prolonged and the recent "green shoots" were not sustainable. Many trade unions also expressed concern that the cost of the stimulus packages would ultimately be paid by the workers. In some countries, the workers were also upset that their governments were willing to spend billions in saving failing banks but had no funds or programme to help workers cope with the effects of the crisis.

Thus, while Singapore had been one of the countries hardest hit by the recession, registering a 10.8 per cent drop in Gross Domestic Product in the first quarter of 2009 and anticipating an unprecedented -9 to -6 per cent GDP forecast for this year, Singapore is in a fortunate position as our strong reserves built up over many years and strong tripartite relationships put us in good stead to meet the challenges head on and emerge stronger.



Government Puts In Double Efforts To Help

By **Vanessa Teo**

Mature and older Singaporeans can look forward to receiving the second payment of their Senior Citizens' Bonus on 1 July 2009. Adult Singaporeans will also be getting their GST Credits – also their second payment – on the same day. In total, the Government payout will amount to over \$1.1 billion this year, and this, in addition to other benefits that Singaporeans will get such as U-Save, Service & Conservancy Charges and rental rebates, property tax and personal income tax rebates, Workfare Income Supplement including the WIS Special Payment, and top-ups to Post Secondary Education Accounts. The \$1.1 billion is double what Government had originally budgeted for; the revision was announced at Budget 2009 as a way to help households cope with the economic downturn.

The first payment of GST Credits and Senior Citizens' Bonus was made on 1 March 2009. Those who have signed up for the GST Credits and/or Senior Citizens' Bonus will automatically receive their July payout. About 97 per cent of adult Singaporeans have done so.

Those who have not signed up are still eligible for both 2009 payouts – including the first payment made on 1 March 2009 – as long as they sign up by 31 December 2009. This can be done online through www.gstoffset.gov.sg or hard copy forms that are available at all Community Clubs/Centres, Community Development Council offices and CPF Service Centres.

Singaporeans who sign up by 21 June 2009 using hard copy forms or 23 June 2009 online will receive the GST Credits and Senior Citizens' Bonus on 1 July 2009 via bank transfer. However, if sign-up is done after these dates, or if individuals have requested for payment to be made via cheque, 4 to 15 working days is required for payouts to be processed.

For additional help, Singaporeans can approach their CDCs, Family Service Centres, grassroots leaders or call ComCare at 1800-2220-000.

NTUC Media Co-operative Limited

Chairman

Noel Hon Chia Chun
noel.hondc@ntucmedia.org.sg

Chief Executive Officer

Seng Han Thong
senght@ntuc.org.sg

Managing Director

Shirley Tan-James
shirleytan@ntucmedia.org.sg

Chief Operating Officer

Alvin Wong Pek Kin
alvinwong@ntucmedia.org.sg

The NTUC This Week Team

Managing Editor

Shirley Tan-Oehler
shirleyo@ntucmedia.org.sg

Senior Journalist

Marcus Lim
marcuslim@ntucmedia.org.sg

Journalists

Nicolette Yeo
nicoletteyeo@ntucmedia.org.sg

Jansen Yeo
jansenyeo@ntucmedia.org.sg

Naseema Banu Mardeen
naseemab@ntucmedia.org.sg

Timothy James Fernandez
timothyjames@ntucmedia.org.sg

Vanessa Teo
vanessateo@ntucmedia.org.sg

Executive Editor (Chinese)

Ho Sao Teck
hosao@ntucmedia.org.sg

Journalist (Chinese)

Wong Teck Tian
wongtt@ntucmedia.org.sg

Art Director

Edmund Seah
edmundseah@ntucmedia.org.sg

Executive Designers

Mohamed Nasir Soeyoeti
soeyoeti@ntucmedia.org.sg

Charles Chong
charleschong@ntucmedia.org.sg

Resident Photographer

Alvin Tan

Sales

Joseph Loh
josephloh@ntucmedia.org.sg

Jimmy Lim
jimmylim@ntucmedia.org.sg

Mike Chew
mikechew@ntucmedia.org.sg

Chris Seng
chriseng@ntucmedia.org.sg

Anabel Lim
anabelim@ntucmedia.org.sg

Sam Gan
samgan@ntucmedia.org.sg

Gena Ang
genasang@ntucmedia.org.sg

Joy Cheng
joycheng@ntucmedia.org.sg

Marketing & Event

Audrey Liu Jiaying
audreyliu@ntucmedia.org.sg

Jolynn Ang Shu Qin
jolynnang@ntucmedia.org.sg

Subscription

Jenny Liao
jenny@ntucmedia.org.sg

Publisher

NTUC Media Co-operative Limited

Address 1 Marina Boulevard #14-01

NTUC Centre Singapore 018989

Phone 62360555 Fax 62361068

Printer Times Printers, Singapore

The NTUC Family Directory

NTUC Switchboard 62138000

Customer Centre 62138008

Business Centre 62138011

bizcentre@ntuc.org.sg

Care & Share 62138201

Social Enterprises

First Campus 62391923

Club 65829876 (Chalet Reservation)

65891666 (Banquet Sales)

Choice Homes 62138022

Eldercare 62138000

Fairprice 64560233

Fosfibre 67570339

Healthcare 67440068

Income 63462683

Learniglob 64712223

Link 62252225

Media 62360555

Thrift & Loan 65347360

Affiliate

RTRC Asia 62924844

© Copyright 2009

The publisher owns the copyright to all photographs and articles in this

publication. No photograph or article may be reproduced in part or in full

without the consent of the publisher.

Money Well Spent



Singapore's swift tripartite response with a united front during this unprecedented world economic downturn and the considerable sums of money spent by the billions on job-related initiatives are showing positive results.

Speaking at the International Labour Organization Summit on the Global Jobs Crisis during the 98th Session of the International Labour Conference in Geneva, Switzerland, on 16 June 2009, Manpower Minister Gan Kim Yong said: "So far, it has been money well spent as jobs are saved. In the first quarter of this year, despite the economy

slowing down by 10.1 per cent year-on-year, we are happy to note that Singapore's unemployment rate of 3.3 per cent remains one of the lowest in the world.

"Employers have also been able to cut costs and save jobs. A recent tripartite survey showed that more than 6 in 10 employers deferred or reduced retrenchments, thanks to the Skills Programme for Upgrading and Resilience (SPUR) and the Jobs Credit scheme. At the same time, more workers have gone for training under SPUR, boosting the quality of Singapore's workforce in the long

run. As at end-May this year, some 107,000 workers committed to train and up-skill under SPUR, and 800 companies are involved in SPUR."

Though retrenchments for the first quarter of 2009 were significantly higher than previous quarters, Mr Gan said: "Although the economic outlook is still uncertain, with strong tripartite cooperation and commitment, we are confident that we will weather the crisis and emerge stronger than before."

He said that the important first step was issuing the Tripartite Guidelines on Managing Excess Manpower in November 2008: "The key message of the guidelines is 'Cut Costs to Save Jobs' and not the more conventional approach of 'Cut Jobs to Save Costs'. The aim is to reduce retrenchments and unemployment, emphasising the importance of shared sacrifice in these uncertain times.

"The tripartite guidelines urge employers to consider alternatives to retrenchment, such as redeploying workers to other areas of work, putting in place flexible wage systems to manage their wage costs and implementing shorter work weeks or temporary layoffs in consultation with unions and workers. Training and upgrading to enhance employability of workers and competitiveness of companies has also been emphasised."

He told participants that SPUR has two key strategies of saving existing jobs by helping employers send their excess manpower for training, and helping workers without jobs find new ones as soon as possible. Workers are encouraged to enhance their employability by undergoing relevant training programmes, while the Government's

Jobs Credit Scheme provides employers with a quarterly cash grant for each local employee they keep in their employ.

"While we have worked hard together to fight the downturn, Singapore remains focused on longer-term objectives. We are doing this through a three-pronged approach. First, we are developing a Globally Competitive Workforce. Apart from building up the capabilities of our workforce, we are raising productivity and encouraging our enterprises to innovate.

"Second, we are enhancing the Income Security and Lifelong Employability of our workers. In 2007, we implemented the Workfare Income Supplement scheme, which rewards low-wage workers and encourages them to work. In 2012, we will enact legislation mandating the re-employment of older workers.

"Third, we will continue to build Globally Leading Workplaces, though improving occupational safety and health and promoting progressive human capital development and employment practices."

Mr Gan added: "Even in these difficult times, when countries are facing job losses and high unemployment, there are opportunities for us to seize, including the chance to deepen regional and international co-operation and partnership.

"...This crisis also offers more opportunities for deepening cooperation and partnership among member states of the ILO. Instead of focusing on protectionist measures, it would be more useful for member states to share our experiences in managing the crisis."