

## **Wide range of experience on salary review panel Team has good understanding of both public, private sectors**

***Cai Haoxiang & Andrea Ong***  
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They are, or have been, at the top levels of their professions, have a good understanding of the corporate world and of how government works.

The eight people who will now set to work reviewing the basis and level of salaries for Singapore's top leaders and political appointment holders are also respected for their contributions to public service.

Observers and analysts familiar with their work say members of the review committee bring a professional competence to the job, honed from experience in a broad swathe of fields in the private and public sectors.

They thus clearly understand the trade-offs required in determining how the salaries of the President, Prime Minister and political appointment holders need to be set.

Governance expert Neo Boon Siong from Nanyang Technological University's Nanyang Business School noted that, for the first time, the committee reviewing such salaries is made up of public figures.

Previous reviews were undertaken by the Public Service Division or a panel of civil servants.

'They are all highly regarded people who run big organisations, they are mature. So if they come up with a recommendation that makes sense, the fallout will hopefully be less,' he said.

Committee chairman Gerard Ee is a retired accountant and charity sector veteran who restored the image of the National Kidney Foundation (NKF) after it was hit by a financial scandal, taking over as NKF chairman in 2005. He chairs Changi General Hospital as well as the Public Transport Council, which approves changes to another hot-button issue: public transport fares.

The rest of the committee wear many hats, not just in the private sector but also in the educational and social fields.

Mr George Quek, founder and chairman of home-grown eatery BreadTalk, is vice-president of the Teochew Poit Ip Huay Kuan clan association, and chairman of the Xinmin Secondary School advisory committee.

Mr Wong Ngit Liong is chairman and chief executive of electronics manufacturer Venture Corporation, as well as on the National University of Singapore Board of Trustees.

Mrs Fang Ai Lian, chairman of insurer Great Eastern Holdings, was chairman of accounting firm Ernst & Young, and worked there for 34 years. She chairs the Charity Council and the Methodist Girls' School management board, as well as the Singapore Management University accounting school advisory board.

Retired accountant Po'ad Shaik Abu Bakar Mattar, a former senior partner of Deloitte & Touche, is a member of the Council of Presidential Advisers and the Public Service Commission, which appoints and promotes senior civil servants.

Another corporate high-flier, lawyer Lucien Wong, is managing partner of Allen & Gledhill and chairman of the Maritime and Port Authority.

Mr John De Payva has been National Trades Union Congress president since 1997 and has represented workers' interest for almost 40 years.

Mr Stephen Lee has led the Singapore National Employers Federation since 1988. He is chairman of Singapore Airlines and previously chaired both port operator PSA International and government trade promotion arm International Enterprise Singapore.

Members are also not new to debate on important or controversial issues. Four of them - Mr Ee, Mr De Payva, Mrs Fang and Mr Lee - have previously served as Nominated MPs.

Senior counsel Alvin Yeo, an MP for Chua Chu Kang GRC, noted that with such a line-up, the committee is well-positioned to understand what motivates talent in the private sector.

He described members such as Mrs Fang and Mr Lucien Wong, whom he knows personally, as 'sensible people' who understand the balance that is needed between offering competitive salaries to attract top talent, and the 'concerns of what the public wants to see in terms of political office holders making a sacrifice'.

Former Nominated MP and political observer Viswa Sadasivan believes committee members are 'credible and competent' individuals with 'professional competence', and that Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong is sincere about the review.

But he worried that 'given how the ministerial salaries issue has so rapidly snowballed in potency... many would see it as a predictable list of 'usual suspects', many of whom are closely linked to the establishment'.

But commenting on his committee members, Mr Ee said last night: 'These are all very good people, known to speak their mind, very independent in their judgments, and that is very important.'

Institute of Policy Studies senior fellow Gillian Koh pointed out that in going about their review, the committee members 'are going to have to work extremely hard in conducting a wide and meaningful public consultation process'.

Mr Ee aside, other members were not available for comment.