

Public Service Division studying recommendations

Lin Yanqin, Tan Weizhen, Esther Ng and Neo Chai Chin

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As substantial cuts to ministerial pay are being proposed — which could lead to junior ministers earning less than a top civil servant — the Public Service Division (PSD) will be studying the proposals to assess whether they can be applied to Civil Service salaries.

Responding to media queries yesterday following the announcement of the committee's recommendations, the PSD said “a careful study will be made before any changes are made”.

“PSD will be studying the principles and proposals put forward in the report for structuring salaries, to assess their relevance and applicability for structuring salaries of senior officers in the Administrative Service, other statutory appointment holders and judicial appointment holders,” added a spokesperson.

In its report, the committee reviewing ministers' salary had said that “the element of significant discount or sacrifice expected of political appointment holders should not be applied to civil servants”, and civil servants should be paid competitive salaries given the keen competition for talent.

Asked yesterday whether ministers should be paid more than civil servants, committee chairman Gerard Ee replied: “I think there's nothing to say that that ought to happen ... Don't forget that S\$1.1 million is the norm, (and for) a more junior minister, (the salary) can be as low as S\$935,000. An acting minister can even be appointed at the grade of an SMS (Senior Minister of State). So there's always that possibility that a civil servant could be paid a bit more than a Minister.”

Analysts Today spoke to felt that salaries in the Civil Service — which currently employs more than 127,000 officers — need not necessarily be revised downwards in tandem with ministerial pay.

Political observer Zulkifli Baharuddin differentiated between the two, calling the review of ministerial salaries a “political exercise”. “(It is) a need to increase moral suasion and prevent it from being eroded — it's not about re-calibrating Civil Service salaries.”

Assistant professor Reuben Wong from the National University of Singapore's Department of Political Science pointed out there are senior civil servants in developed countries who earn more than their political masters. “The perm secs (permanent secretaries) have many years of experience and expertise and having worked under different ministers and governments (often of different parties),” he said.

Noting that the Civil Service is a career with its own “career track”, Dr Gillian Koh, senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, said: “Political office holders, or prospective ones are expected to choose, volitionally, out of a conviction of service to the public to make the sacrifice.”