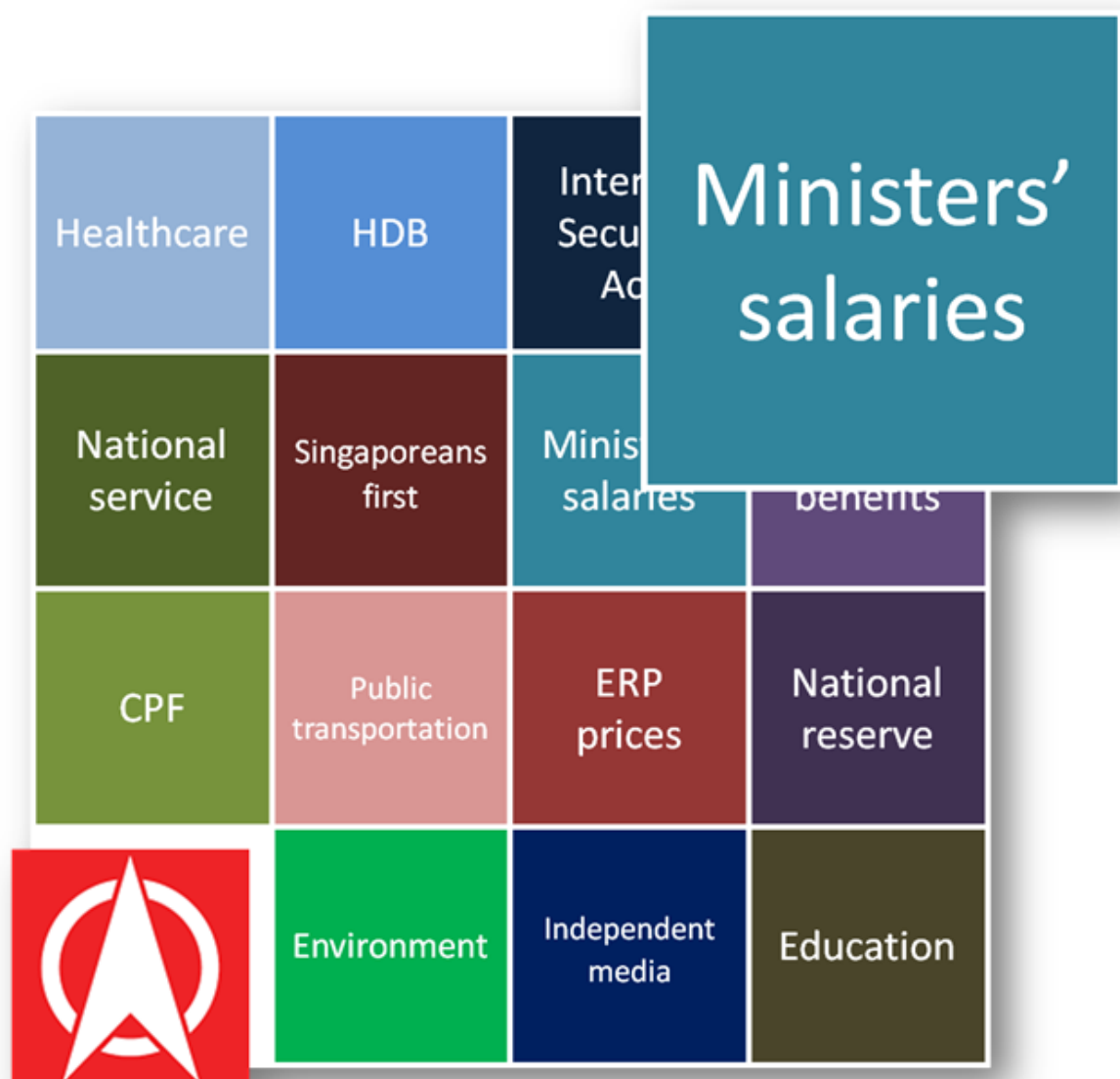


ETHICAL SALARIES FOR A PUBLIC SERVICE CENTERED GOVERNMENT



POLICY UNIT

SINGAPORE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Ethical Salaries for a Public Service Centered Government

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Singapore's cabinet ministers are, by far, the highest paid in the world. The prime minister is paid more than six times the president of the United States. In defending the current salary structure, the Government puts forth two main arguments: One, the high pay is needed to keep ministers from becoming corrupt and, two, it will help to attract and retain capable people in positions of national leadership.

International comparisons show that current salaries of ministers in Singapore are excessively high and that the amounts should be considerably reduced through a revised formula. Ministers should be motivated by a strong sense of public service rather than being driven by monetary reward. Importantly, ministerial salaries should not be compared to those of the highest paid CEOs but rather to the lowest 20 percent of Singaporean wage earners.

The Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) is of the view that while it is necessary to provide cabinet ministers with adequate and reasonable remuneration, the current salaries which amount to millions of dollars per annum are, indeed, excessive. Furthermore, the actual pay of the ministers are not publicly revealed.

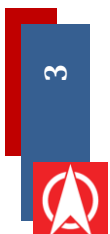
The SDP proposes that ministerial salaries be reduced based on a revised formula. Such a formula needs to have built into it features of transparency and accountability overseen by an independent commission which can withstand both domestic and international scrutiny. Singapore's ministerial wage formula should be based on international best practices and reflect the strong sense of ethics and public service.

We present five key recommendations that will correct the excesses of the present ministerial salary system and bring it into line with international principles of fair remuneration for government leaders.

The five recommendations are:

1. Establish an independent salary commission to review ministerial salaries on an annual basis.
2. Discontinue variable bonuses such as those tied to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth and individual performances of ministers.
3. Peg ministerial pay to the wages of the lowest 20 percent of Singaporean workers.
4. Provide allowances for ministers in their performance of state duties.
5. Establish an independent anti-corruption board that has the power to investigate ministers for corruption.

Reducing ministerial salaries using this revised formula will help achieve three major objectives. One, it will address the call by Singaporeans for fair and ethical salaries for our elected public officials; two, it will ensure that ministers do not lose focus in raising the standard of living of all Singaporeans, and not just those at the top of the economic chain; and three, it will attract national leaders who are dedicated to serving the country and the people and not individuals who focus on advancing their own financial interests.



INTRODUCTION

Ministerial salaries were a constant thread that weaved through many of the issues raised during the General Elections in May 2011. The key concern was the high remuneration of the PAP ministers vis-a-vis their performance especially in the areas of cost of living, health care, labour and immigration. Many feel that the current salary structure is elitist in nature and that the PAP's ministers are out of touch with the financial difficulties of those in the lower- and middle-income wage groups. The elections resulted in the fall of the PAP's vote share to 60.14%, the lowest since independence. The theme of high salaries for elected public office continued during the Presidential Elections in August 2011.

This groundswell compelled Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to appoint a commission to evaluate ministers' and the president's pay. The commission, headed by Mr Gerard Ee, is



expected to release its findings by year's end. In the past when cabinet ministers decided to raise their wages, they did this very quickly, using guidelines proposed by a Government white paper. However, widespread international best practices insist that matters relating to salaries of elected officials fall under the purview of legally constituted independent bodies. SDP welcomes the creation of a review commission as a small step forward. However, we note, the current Terms of Reference asks the review committee to use "comparable jobs in the private sector" as a benchmark.

We are concerned that this does not address the principal issues behind the unhappiness about ministerial salaries. The pegging of the salaries to top earners has led to the PAP to focus on increasing the wealth of the richest in the country while neglecting the poor. This has led to the widening of income disparity in Singapore.

The SDP has over the years repeatedly called for a reduction in ministerial wages. We have written about this in our newspaper, *The New Democrat*, our website, our pre-election economic paper *It's About You* and in our Shadow Budget 2011. We raised the issue with the Public Service Division and commented on it in our videos. Our 2011 election candidates made The SDP Promise to raise the issue in parliament if they were elected. This policy paper takes our work further by proposing concrete adjustments to the system of ministerial pay. We base our recommendations on contemporary international best practices following a review of examples from various industrialised countries and territories such as Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Hong Kong SAR, Japan, New Zealand, Sweden and the United Kingdom. We also take into account suggestions proposed by Singaporeans. This report will provide an alternative basis for comparison and contrast to the one that will be released by the Government-appointed commission.

Lee-era ministerial wage model

The rationale for the current model of ministerial salary stems from the former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. In the 1960s and 70s the prime minister's salary was \$29,000 per month. In 1985 Mr Lee argued for a pay increase. He opined that politicians must be paid wages commensurate with professionals who manage big corporations. This is in order to

keep the ministers from becoming corrupt as well as to attract top talent from the private sector. Shortly thereafter, ministers' salaries were dramatically increased.

In 1994, under second Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, Parliament approved proposals contained in the White Paper, *Competitive Salaries for Competent and Honest Government*. The White Paper suggested that the Government adopt a pay formula where salaries of ministers and senior civil servants are linked to the income tax returns of selected top earners in the private sector. This private-sector-based model has continued under the current Prime Minister.

In the 2006/2007 fiscal year ministerial salaries increased 27 percent. The following year saw another 15 percent jump. That raised PM Lee Hsien Loong's salary to \$3.8 million per annum. Under a new formula, the salaries included bonuses linked to the GDP. In 2011, the ministers paid themselves bonuses that amounted to 24 months (see Table A). Of particular concern is the Performance Bonus (PB) which can range between zero and 14 months of the salary. This component is determined solely by the prime minister and is kept secret.

TABLE A: MINISTERIAL SALARY STRUCTURE: PAY BONUSES IN 2011

	No. of months per year
<u>Fixed components:</u>	
1) Monthly Pay	12
2) Non-Pensionable Annual Allowance (aka 13th month)	1
3) Special Allowance	1
4) Public Sector Leadership Allowance	2
Subtotal	16
<u>Variable component</u>	
6) Annual Variable Component (AVC)	1.5
7) Special Variable Payment (SVP)	1 (up to 1.6 possible)
8) GDP Bonus	8
9) Performance Bonus	10 (up to 14 possible)
Subtotal	20.5
Total	36.5

Source: <http://yoursdp.org/index.php/news/singapore/4667-800-for-us-millions-for-themselves>

TABLE B: MINISTERS' SALARIES IN 2007

Position	Annual Salary	Percentage rise
President	\$3,187,100	up 24.9%
Prime Minister	\$3,091,200	up 25.5%
Senior Minister	\$3,043,300	up 13.5%
Minister Mentor	\$3,043,300	up 13.5%
Deputy Prime Minister	\$2,452,500	up 18.8%
Minister & Snr Perm Sec	\$1,593,500	up 32.5% (MR4 Grade)
Entry Superscale Grade	\$384,000	up 3.3% (SR9 Grade)
Member of Parliament	\$216,300	up 23.2%

Source: Compiled from publicly available information

Singaporeans have repeatedly voiced their disapproval of the high salaries. Even though PM Lee called for a salary review in late May 2011, PAP MPs continue to defend the status quo.



Only days after the salary review was announced PAP MP Lim Wee Kiak justified the formula as one that gave the ministers "dignity" when negotiating with their corporate counterparts. Mr Lim subsequently retracted the comment but the words reveal the deep-seated thinking that resides within the rank and file of a political party that has been in power over 50 years.

Key reforms needed

Ministers should be paid a reasonable salary for them to execute their duties with dignity and without having to resort to corrupt means to support themselves and their families. The current levels of their salaries are, however, not reasonable. The PAP's argument to link salaries to the corporate sector does not square with current international best practices and does not find resonance with the majority of Singaporeans who expect their elected representatives to be motivated by a strong sense of public service and not be paid salary levels of top corporate leaders. Below are three principal reasons for reform of the current system.

1. PLACE MORE EMPHASIS ON PUBLIC SERVICE

Placing emphasis on monetary incentives to encourage talented Singaporeans to take public office is not in keeping with global democratic and public service standards. Politicians in established democracies are subject to electoral contests where policy platforms are promoted by the candidates and subsequently endorsed or rejected by the electorate. Reforming the system to place more emphasis on political competition for ideas and talent in the spirit of public service rather than reaping the benefits of a high wage structure will help lay a firm foundation for democratic participation and genuine public service in Singapore.

Political leadership is different from corporate leadership. While the former is motivated by a sense of serving the public, even to make personal sacrifices for the common good, corporate leaders are driven by profits, regardless of whether those profits benefit the nation or not. In the corporate sector, the company and its shareholders take priority over everything else whereas government leaders must put the interests of the citizenry first and foremost.

Therefore the kinds of people whom political parties need to attract are those who have the nation's well-being at heart. This means that those who aspire to govern the country must be imbued with a strong sense of selflessness and love for the nation. This necessarily means that the idea to enrich oneself financially through remuneration for one's services is incompatible with such a type of leadership. Those attracted to public service will be different from individuals who seek public office as a means to get rich. On the other hand, passionate individuals who care for the people of Singapore would relish the challenge of serving in a system which rewards commitment to the well-being of all Singaporeans.

2. De-link bonuses to GDP growth

The current ministerial salary model presupposes that high salaries for cabinet ministers are needed to bring about economic growth. This has not been shown to be the case in countries like Canada and the UK. Lower ministerial remuneration in these countries has not compromised economic growth. Conversely high wages may not necessarily lead to competent performance and hence economic expansion. The link between wages and competence is spurious at best.



Bonuses



GDP Growth

In Singapore, such a flawed assumption is made worse when ministers' salaries are tied to the GDP. Part of a minister's pay includes a component that called the GDP Bonus (GB)

which can be as much as eight months of the monthly pay. If the GDP for the year rises, so does the GB. One drawback of such a formula is that it does not necessarily follow that just because the ministers are doing a good job, the country's economy will improve. Neither does it mean that if the GDP increases, the ministers are doing a good job.

Furthermore, increase in the GDP does not mean that the quality of life for Singaporeans has improved. For example, the GDP can expand and benefit only the rich segment of the population while leaving the middle- and lower-income groups poorer. Or the GDP could increase merely by increasing the sheer size of the population as is the case of Singapore in the last decade or so. If everyone earns 10 percent less, but there are 20 percent more people, our GDP will still increase. Such an outcome, however, does not benefit the people. Having the ministers' salaries tied to our GDP may cause the ministers to focus on increasing the wealth of the richest in the country or importing a large number of low-cost workers just to expand their own bonuses. The large majority of the people do not benefit from such a practice.

3. Establish independent institutions

The PAP also says that high ministerial salaries will prevent ministers from becoming corrupt. There are, however, other avenues that can serve to prevent corruption and develop a non-corrupt culture amongst elected officials. One of these is to establish

Independent from



governmental influence

independent institutions that collate and publish information on politicians' commercial interests, shareholdings and assets. Such a practice exists in countries like Finland and Sweden where politicians' wealth are publicly reported. It serves as a good model for helping to prevent corruption without the need for expensive and questionable salary measures for our ministers. In addition a separate body should also be incorporated with powers to investigate corrupt practices by government leaders.

TABLE C: CORRUPTION PERCEPTION INDEX 2010 (SELECTED COUNTRIES)

Country	Index
Australia	8.7
Canada	8.9
Finland	9.2
Germany	7.9
Hong Kong SAR	8.4
Japan	7.8
New Zealand	9.3
Sweden	9.2
United Kingdom	7.6

Source: Transparency International, "Corruption Perception Index 2010", 26 October 2010.



Table C shows a list of jurisdictions with their scores in Transparency International's Corruptions Perception Index (CPI). Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, Sweden, Hong Kong and United Kingdom were selected as they are ranked highly in the CPI. (The scores are based on a scale of 0 to 10 with 0 as the most corrupt and 10 as the least corrupt countries.) The idea is to compare the salaries of ministers in these countries to those of Singapore's. If these places do not pay government leaders the amounts that ministers are paid in Singapore and yet are able to keep their countries relatively corrupt-free, the PAP's argument that high pay is necessary to prevent corruption is debunked.

Note that while the CPI for these countries are very high, the salaries of their countries' leaders are nowhere near what PM Lee Hsien Loong draws (about \$3.1 million in 2011) as shown in Tables D and E.

It also seems odd that PAP ministers expect huge salaries to resist the temptation of corruption when lower level officers are not similarly compensated. Security officers, for example, are paid low wages when their job exposes them to corruption on a daily basis. Yet the argument that they need high wages to prevent them from corruption is not applied in their case. Are we saying that the average security guard in Singapore has a higher moral fibre when it comes to resisting temptation than a PAP minister?

TABLE D: SALARIES OF HEADS OF GOVERNMENT

Country	Highest Executive Position	Annual Salary (in local currency)	Singapore Dollar Equivalent
Australia	Prime Minister	A\$387,264	\$510,495
Canada	Prime Minister	C\$315,462	\$399,338
Finland	Prime Minister	€178,874	\$315,852
Germany	Chancellor	€230,836	\$407,605
Hong Kong SAR	Chief Executive	\$US513,245	\$654,938
Japan	Prime Minister	JPY24,720,000	\$412,758
New Zealand	Prime Minister	NZ\$400,500	\$409,693
Sweden	Prime Minister	SEK1,620,000	\$313,996
United Kingdom	Prime Minister	£198,661	\$404,071

Source: Compiled from latest publicly available figures (Singapore Dollars exchange rate 24 October 2011)



TABLE E: AVERAGE SALARY OF MINISTERS

Country	Position in Government	Annual Salary (in local currency)	SGD Equivalent
Australia	Cabinet Minister	AUD 235,704	\$310,816
Canada	Minister	CAD 233,247	\$295,263
Finland	Cabinet Minister	EUR 116,748	\$206,169
Germany	Federal Minister	EUR 184,668	\$326,083
Hong Kong SAR	Minister	HKD 3,219,660 (2006 figures, inclusive of entitlements)	\$527,926
Japan	Ministers of the State	JPY 18,036,000	\$301,176
New Zealand	Cabinet Minister of the Crown	NZD 249,100	\$254,864
Sweden	Minister	SEK 1,296,000	\$251,092
United Kingdom	Cabinet Minister	GBP 145,492	\$295,922

Source: Compiled from latest publicly available figures (Singapore Dollars exchange rate 24 October 2011)

International standards of salary models

Below are some aggregate international standards that policy-makers and independent commissions that established democracies use as a guide when setting ministerial salaries. While salary formulas reviewed vary from country to country, there were clear similarities and common practices in the various jurisdictions.



1. Salaries are pegged to median incomes or mid-range civil service salary bands

Salaries are not pegged to the highest wage earners. Instead, salaries for ministers are either pegged to median incomes of citizens (in Canada) or to the wages of certain ranked officers in the civil service (in Australia and the UK). In some places, salaries are also pegged to the remuneration received by ordinary members of parliament. They are not compared or tied to top positions in the corporate world.

2. Independent Commissions determine remunerations and investigate corruption lapses

In many countries with democratic institutions, there have been independent commissions tasked to determine the quantum of ministerial remuneration whilst upholding the notion that public service is not about exorbitant financial reward, entitlements and pensions. These commissions meet every year to review salaries for the next financial year. The cabinet can elect not to receive any recommended increases. These countries also have independent anti-corruption agencies that can receive complaints, investigate trespasses, hold politicians accountable for corrupt practices and ensure ethical behavior in financial

matters. Politicians are required to publicly declare their assets and highlight any conflicts of interests.

3. BONUSES ARE NOT INCLUDED FOR MINISTERIAL OFFICE HOLDERS

The salaries in Tables D and E above are determined by independent commissions. They are based on civil service pay bands or median incomes, there are no bonus components. This approach is more appropriate as it measures public administration performance rather than private sector achievement. Instead of bonuses, MPs and ministers in many of these established democracies receive travel and housing entitlements on top of their salaries. While there have been abuses of allowances in the past, most notably in the UK, it is noted that the revelations came to light as a result of a free and open media which scrutinized the allowance claims of parliamentarians. In the open and democratic systems cited above elected officials are subject to public scrutiny in the expenses they incur, thus ensuring that corruption by these individuals is kept to a minimum.

Recommendations

The SDP presents five key recommendations which will correct the excesses of the present ministerial salary structure in Singapore.

1. Establish an independent salary commission

All salaries, adjustments, pensions¹, and claims entitlements by office-holders (including ex-office holders) be determined and reviewed by an independent commission established by law with clear processes for nomination and confirmation of its members. The commission should be non-partisan with non-government representatives. It should meet yearly or as and when appropriate to determine remunerations for each financial year. Such a commission shall compile and publish annually the salaries, along with a clear breakdown of all its component parts, of all political office holders. Ministers should also, upon their formal appointment, declare to this commission their commercial interests, shareholdings, directorships and other financial duties and interests. The commission shall publish all this information in a consolidated public statement.

2. DISCONTINUE VARIABLE BONUSES

The current method of paying variable bonuses should be abolished. Instead, all elements of the fixed salary components should be determined by the salary commission mentioned in the preceding paragraph, and shall be consistent with the remuneration received by all workers as recommended by the National Wage Council.

3. Peg ministerial pay to MP's allowance

Ministerial salaries should be pegged to the bottom 20 percent of Singaporean wage earners. In the last ten years, workers in this percentile saw their real incomes stagnate (Ministry of Manpower, October 2011) even as the salaries of the ministers rose to record highs. Pegging ministerial pay to the lowest-income bracket will ensure that the living standards of this group rise with the rest of the population.

¹ According to the Parliamentary Pensions Act, Ministers who serve a minimum of 8 years may be granted a pension on the pensionable component of the salary for the rest of their lives. This amount is capped at 2/3 of the pensionable component of the salary. The Act currently allows those who qualify for pensions to concurrently draw their pension while also drawing a salary whilst holding office. Members of Parliament elected after January 1995 presently are not eligible for pension.



This can be done by tying the MP's allowance to the mean wage of the poorest 20 percent. Ministers are then paid a multiple of the MP's allowance. The SDP recommends that the MP allowance be 10 times \$1,400 (mean wage of the bottom 20th percentile based on the assumption of a minimum wage in place). Ministers are paid three times the MP allowance while the prime minister 4 times more. These salary levels are inclusive of the ministers' MP allowance. Table F below shows the formula and actual salaries of ministers. The revised annual salary for the prime minister will see a reduction of about 80 percent from the current level. Even so, this still makes the prime minister among the world's highest paid.

TABLE F: RECOMMENDED FORMULA FOR MINISTERIAL SALARIES

Designation	Formula	Monthly Salary	Annual Salary
Member of Parliament	10 x \$1,400	\$14,000	\$168,000
Cabinet Minister	3 x \$14,000	\$42,000.00	\$504,000
Prime Minister	4 x \$14,000	\$56,000	\$672,000
President	4.5 x \$14,000	\$63,000	\$756,000

4. PROVIDE ALLOWANCES FOR MINISTERS

Ministers will be allowed to make claims for the expenses incurred while performing their official duties. The claims Ministers should be governed by a schedule, similar to civil service regulations, which should be published by the salary commission to ensure transparency and accountability. For the same reason, it should also publish claims made by the ministers.

5. ESTABLISH AN INDEPENDENT ANTI-CORRUPTION BOARD

We also recommend that the Corrupt Practices Investigation Board (CPIB) be moved out of the Prime Minister's Office and be answerable directly to Parliament as an independent agency. Its annual reports are to be made public and parliamentary deliberations of the report should be published on the internet for public scrutiny. The CPIB should be able to investigate all ministers and officials without needing the approval of the President of Singapore.

Conclusion

The ministerial pay issue is not a new issue for Singaporeans. Since the late 1980s and early 90s, the PAP government has repeatedly argued that high ministerial salaries will (1) attract the best talent in Singapore to serve in government, (2) deter ministers from enriching themselves in corrupt ways, and (3) deliver economic growth. This has resulted in Singapore ministers earning the highest salaries in the world.

While it is agreed that ministers should be paid adequately, handsomely even, the current salary level is clearly excessive and is in need of urgent reform to bring it in line with international best practices and ethical standards. A fair and transparent method to determine the ministerial salaries will attract dedicated Singaporeans who have the interests of the nation at heart, as opposed to those who look to selfishly advance their monetary interests, to serve in the highest offices of the country.



The SDP's recommendations address the widespread calls by Singaporeans for a reduction in ministerial salaries. Ministers are elected by the people and it is only right that they heed the voices of the people and accept the recommendations made by the SDP.

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