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*Minimum purchase of \$150 in premium

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HOME NEWS

Civil service job cuts for 'accountability'

SINGAPORE'S retrenchment figure, which dropped to 2,055 in the second quarter of this year – the lowest in three-and-a-half years – might dip even further in the coming months.

Said Dr Ng Eng Hen, Minister for Manpower and Second Minister for Education: "For most economies, the labour market and job situation lags behind the economic situation by about half a year. When business goes up for employers, they will hire more and retrench less.

"Businesses are gearing up towards better and greater demand to create more jobs, which should ease our unemployment."

Dr Ng said the year-end festive season was traditionally the strongest hiring period. But the ministry would stick with its official unemployment rate forecast of four per cent for the year.

As for the headcount cutting exercise

in the civil service, Dr Ng said it "should not be seen as a manpower reduction, but rather a way of becoming more efficient".

Up to 8,100 jobs – or about 9 per cent of the civil service headcount – will be cut over the next three years in an attempt to restructure and streamline the Government.

This is "to ensure we are accountable to the Government".

"We must seek to be efficient and lean because this involves taxpayers' money. It doesn't mean that we will reduce manpower because we have to.

"It should be seen as a way to make sure that manpower is consistent with the needs of the agency," said Dr Ng.

He was speaking to reporters at the Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC Healthy Heart Day, where he worked out and ran alongside some 2,000 residents as well as Home Affairs Minister Wong Kan Seng at the Toa Payoh Stadium. – *Lee U-Wen*

A second chance for some prisoners

Restaurant couple trains and hires them

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AFTER watching prison inmates slice and dice their way through July's North East Iron Chef competition, restaurant owners Jefri Sidik and wife Madam Noeli were so impressed that they wanted to do their part to help some of them.

Today, one reformed convict and two others on the home detention scheme are undergoing on-the-job training at the couple's Seri Kampung restaurant at Geylang Serai.

This initiative is the first such spin-off from the competition.

"We decided to make this a training ground for inmates. They will learn here and are not obliged to continue after completing their sentence," said Mr Jefri.

"We just want to give them a second chance because we know how difficult life can be (for them)," he added.

This trio of ex-offenders has the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (Score) to thank for helping them find employment.

Each year, Score trains more than 400 inmates for



Inmates on the home detention scheme learning to prepare food at the Seri Kampung restaurant.

jobs through courses and work attachments.

"We help them find jobs in the sales industry or at restaurants. Our Employment Assistance Unit sees about six to eight ex-inmates daily," said the unit's senior manager, Mr Edward Wong.

One 38-year-old ex-inmate had just completed his five-and-a-half year sentence for drug abuse and started work at the restaurant yesterday.

With a big smile, he said: "I feel great – I get to prove myself and show society that I can be useful. Today, I peeled onions and

chopped vegetables."

Another reformed drug addict, aged 41, has four months to go on his home detention programme.

"If all goes well, I will finish the rest of my sentence here and see if I can move on," he said.

Speaking to reporters at the restaurant's official opening yesterday, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Mayor of North East CDC, Mr Zainul Abidin Rasheed, said: "I applaud this move by Seri Kampung ... Hopefully, more organisations in the private sector will come forward to play their part."