

Govt boosts cleaning sector

Grants offered to firms that look beyond price when offering contracts

BY CAI HAOXIANG

THE Government is wooing businesses, in its bid to encourage Singaporeans to be cleaners and reduce the reliance on foreign workers.

It is offering grants of up to \$75,000 or a maximum of 5 per cent of a contract's value to any organisation that looks beyond just the cheapest price when awarding a cleaning contract.

The grants totalling \$2 million were announced yesterday by labour chief Lim Swee Say, who said the target is to raise the proportion of local workers in the cleaning sector to 70 per cent.

He did not give the current proportion but added:

"We do not foresee the day when 100 per cent of cleaners will be local workers

but at the same time, we do not think this over-dependence on foreign workers is sustainable."

The grants will be handed out by the Workforce Development Agency under a programme called Best Sourcing Initiative (BSI) Early Adopters Scheme.

It is targeted at the private sector which has been slow to adopt BSI, in which contracts are awarded based not just on price, but also on quality and the performance of the bidder.

The cleaning industry is among six sectors eyed for the BSI, introduced by the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) in 2006 to coax companies to invest in upgrading workers to raise productivity and pay.

But government agencies and town councils are among the first to embrace BSI in awarding cleaning contracts, which has helped many cleaners to earn about \$1,000 to \$1,200 a month last year, around one-third more.

To further promote the image of cleaners, NTUC co-organised Singapore's first Cleaner's Day celebrations yesterday at



Labour chief Lim Swee Say serving food to cleaners at the Cleaner's Day celebrations yesterday at Swissotel The Stamford Hotel in Raffles City. The Government hopes to draw more local workers to the cleaning industry, raising its proportion to 70 per cent. ST PHOTO: CHEW SENG KIM

Swissotel The Stamford Hotel in Raffles City.

It was attended by officials of 60 companies and 300 cleaners who, among other things, tucked into a high-tea buffet and received shoulder and neck massages.

Mr Lim thanked the cleaners, saying "everyone in Singapore owes a great deal to your service".

During the four-hour event, he also launched a 52-page booklet on how to ensure worker safety and health in the cleaning industry.

The booklet, for cleaning companies and those who hire them, was put together by government and union officials and cleaning contractors.

It had tips ranging from practical ideas on how to clean effectively to measures

that can prevent injury to cleaners.

Cleaning companies like ISS Facility Services cheered the government grant.

Its managing director Woon Chiap Chan, speaking in Singlish to make his point, said: "Cheap cleaning no good, good cleaning no cheap."

He added: "It's a good start, especially for small to medium-sized contracts that can be up to \$60,000 a month."

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