



in the news

3 Iran's Supreme Leader ordered an investigation into allegations of election fraud, offering hope to the opposition, as unrest continues to rock Tehran.

8 Don't go to school, says MOE, as it reminds students who have travelled to H1N1 affected areas, such as Australia, the United States and Mexico, to stay home for seven days.

13 Hong Kong government's top brass, including Chief Executive Donald Tsang, is to take a pay cut of 5.38 per cent, according to media reports.

26 Voices Editor Agatha Koh Brazil has Coffee With an HIV ward nurse, Akhterun Nisha Idris, who is counsellor, confidante and nurse all at once.

30 Meet Steve McCurry, the man behind one of the 20th century's most famous photographs and find out what lies behind his fascination with Asia.



41 The economic downturn strikes off the pitch as the Super Reds admit to cashflow problems and two players seek redress over unpaid wages.

B1 Private residential property sales surged to their highest level in almost two years in May, according to the latest data from the URA.

B4 Premier Wen Jiabao said China's economic recovery has yet to find a solid footing, as fresh data showed foreign direct investment fell 17.8 per cent in May.

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Q1 LABOUR MARKET REPORT

For 3 jobs, 10 seekers

6,200 jobs shed — a six-fold increase over April estimates; real earnings shrink 5.8 per cent

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THE final figure well exceeded April's preliminary estimates, indicating that unemployment in the first quarter was far worse than originally thought — not a good omen for the second quarter and the months ahead, say analysts.

According to the Manpower Ministry, the labour market shed 6,200 jobs in three months, a six-fold increase of the earlier 1,000 figure which signalled the first quarterly contraction in nearly six years.

"It's probable the job losses showed up very sharply at the end (of the quarter) in a short period of time, and that discrepancy to me is alarming because it shows how quickly things can change," said Nanyang Technological University economist Randolph Tan.

The contraction was driven by sharper-than-expected cutbacks in manufacturing, as well as job losses in the external-oriented services industries such as hotels, restaurants and financial services.

This huge rise in the number of unemployed, coupled with falling job vacancies, meant that in March there were just 31 openings for every 100 jobseekers. That's a drastic turnaround from 114 per 100 a year ago and 51 per 100 at the end of last year, though not yet hitting the low of 21 per 100 in September 2003.

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NUS economist Shandre Thangavelu

Also significant: Nominal wages fell for the first time in six-and-a-half years, hence real earnings shrank 5.8 per cent despite easing inflation.

While there's been talk of green shoots and rallies, without the economic fundamentals picking up, economists warn, the labour market is likely to deteriorate further for the rest of the year.

"What pick-up we've seen so far is coming from the stock market, and the stock market doesn't create jobs," said National University of Singapore economist Shandre Thangavelu. "There are still toxic assets in the financial sector to be fixed, exports are still down, the United States economy is still adjusting, so we haven't seen improvement needed to drive the jobs market."

According to MOM, for instance, a net weighted 15 per cent of services firms expect to cut headcount in the second quarter.

Even as unemployment registered at 3.3 per cent for the first quarter, HSBC senior Asian economist Robert Prior-Wandesforde predicts it could hit 4 to 4.5 per cent this year.

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Time to 'rebrand' the civil service?

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WHAT if working in the civil service meant you had at least half-a-day off a week to work on innovative ideas? Or you could give suggestions via an employee online forum and have others vote for your idea?

To attract the young, net-savvy generation into the civil service, governments need to redefine the workplace, said Mr Steve Ressler, co-founder of the United States non-profit organisation Young Government Leaders, at the inaugural iGov Global Exchange held here yesterday.

Drawing from well-known examples such as Google's popular workplace and the United States Transport Security Administration's Idea factory, Mr Ressler said the Net generation wants its voice heard.

"Government service is seen as a place where people think (employees) are lazy, not an exciting place to work," he said. It needs to be "rebranded" as work that "makes a difference in the world now".

The 28-year-old, who had joined the US government after graduation, noted the lack of young faces in the organisation. In Singapore, the perennial challenge is to draw and retain top young talent.

A survey last June by the Singapore e-Government Leadership Centre (eGL) found only 29 per cent of some 2,000 respondents would choose the civil service as their first option, compared with 49 per cent who preferred working for a multinational company.

While the recession may have helped change sentiments for the moment — a recent BrightSparks survey showed 33.8 per cent of top students were keen on

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