

SELF-HELP GROUPS ASK BETTER-OFF TO CHIP IN MORE

Funding boost through govt grants

From next year, the Chinese, Indian and Eurasian self-help groups will raise monthly contribution rates. High-income earners face the largest increases. The groups said they need more money to cope with rising costs and to roll out new programmes. These contributions, which people can opt out of or give more if they choose, are deducted automatically from monthly salaries.

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Even as ethnic self-help groups raise their contribution rates, they will get a funding boost through larger government grants.

Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Lawrence Wong is expected to give the details today.

Currently, the Government matches the donations raised by the groups, subject to an annual cap. Last year, the cap was raised for the matching grant for Yayasan Mendaki, the Association of Muslim Professionals and Malay Muslim organisations from \$4 million to \$5 million from this financial year onwards.

The Singapore Indian Development Association (Sinda) now receives up to \$1.7 million a year, while the Eurasian Association gets not more than \$200,000 annually.

The Chinese Development Assistance Council (CDAC) does not receive yearly grants. It received a one-off grant of \$10 million when it was set up in 1992 to be used until 1997.

Senior Minister of State for Law and Education Indraneel Rajah, who is Sinda's president, said at a community forum yesterday that the increased funding will be announced today. CDAC chairman and Health Minister Gan Kim Yong, who gave details on CDAC's revised contribution rates, would say only that Mr Wong would be giving details soon.

Mr Wong had said in April that if the ethnic groups raised more funds, the Government would also provide more in matching grants. "It's in line with our philosophy that the Government and the community both work together to help individuals," he said.

Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs Yaacob Ibrahim, speaking at a book launch by the Malay Heritage Foundation yesterday, explained why Mendaki was not raising its rates like the other self-help groups.

Mendaki last revised its rates in 2009, and Muslim employees pay \$2 to \$16 a month. Those earning up to \$200 need not contribute.

He said: "I think we have taxed the community enough and we thank the community for their contribution, so we see no need for us in the immediate future to raise the contribution rates."

Priscilla Goy