

This page was printed from channelnewsasia.com

TITLE: Two-pronged approach to managing foreign workers: Tan Chuan-Jin

POSTED: 07 Jul 2014 15:52

URL: <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/two-pronged-approach-to/1242676.html>

Manpower Ministry moving to reduce reliance on low-cost labour, decentralising dorms, says Minister Tan Chuan-Jin in Parliament on Monday (July 7).

SINGAPORE: Manpower Minister Tan Chuan-Jin, responding in Parliament on Monday (July 7) to the Committee of Inquiry's (COI) recently-released report on the Little India riot, spelt out the Government's two-pronged approach on the management of the foreign workforce: Raising the profile of workers here by helping companies reduce their reliance on low-cost labour, and improving the workers' accommodation and recreation facilities.

Mr Tan highlighted the fact that foreigner growth has slowed down significantly due to tightening measures, with most sectors having to adopt a high-productivity, manpower-lean approach. The foreign worker growth rate dropped from 9.4 per cent in 2011 to 4.6 per cent in 2012, and halved again to just 2.3 per cent in 2013, he told Parliament.

"Even as we undertake to more effectively manage the foreign workers in our midst, the broader lesson is that growth in foreign worker numbers cannot go unabated. In line with the recommendations made by the Economic Strategies Committee in 2010, we have begun to moderate the growth of foreign workers to more sustainable levels, with a greater emphasis on productivity improvements," said Mr Tan.

"We have also taken deliberate and progressive steps to raise the quality profile of our foreign workforce and help businesses reduce their reliance on low-cost foreign labour. This is a painful but necessary adjustment ... the Government has introduced the S\$5.9 billion Quality Growth Programme in Budget 2013 to help our businesses and industries make this transition."

MORE "SELF-CONTAINED" DORMITORIES

Mr Tan said the recommendation to make more services and amenities available to foreign workers outside of congregation areas such as Little India is already in process.

"This is something that we are already doing, and intend to step up on. Providing for the needs of foreign workers requires strong inter-agency coordination overseen by an inter-ministerial committee, covering issues like housing, transport and security," he said.

He added that efforts are being made to speed up the construction of "self-contained" dormitories with in-built amenities and recreational facilities, such as mini-marts, gyms, canteens and TV rooms. The aim is to reduce the workers' need to travel to established congregation areas for basic services.

He said: "MOM will be establishing a regulatory framework for large dormitories that have a larger impact on their surrounding communities. I am pleased to note that from our engagements with industry, the operators are on board with us on this."

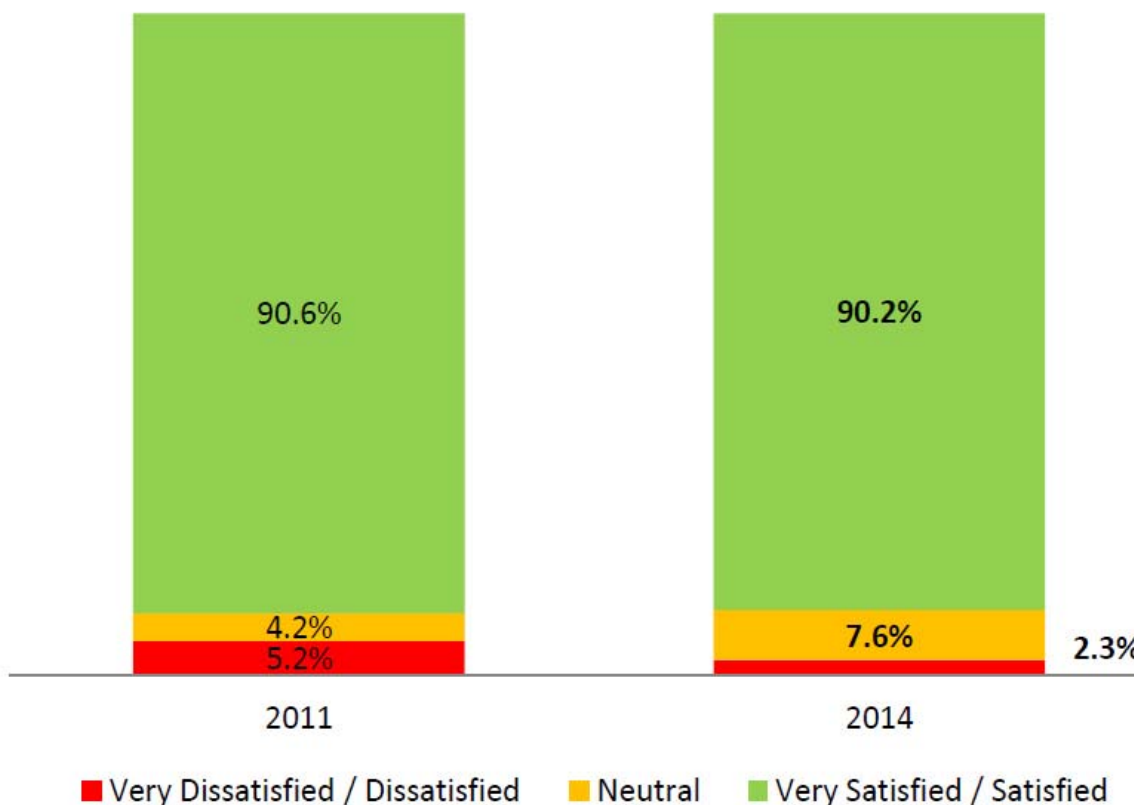
More information of the regulatory framework will be made known in the coming months, Mr Tan said.

More dedicated recreation centres for foreign workers, beyond the existing four in Soon Lee, Kaki Bukit, Woodlands and Penjuru, will be established, he said in Parliament. Such centres provide a wider range of amenities that individual dormitories may not be able to, such as remittance and banking services, supermarkets and sports facilities.

Mr Tan added that his ministry is planning to create more targeted and easy-to-understand materials for foreign workers to grasp key messages. Likewise, the MOM will work with more partners, such as student volunteers, who have expressed an interest in befriending foreign worker groups.

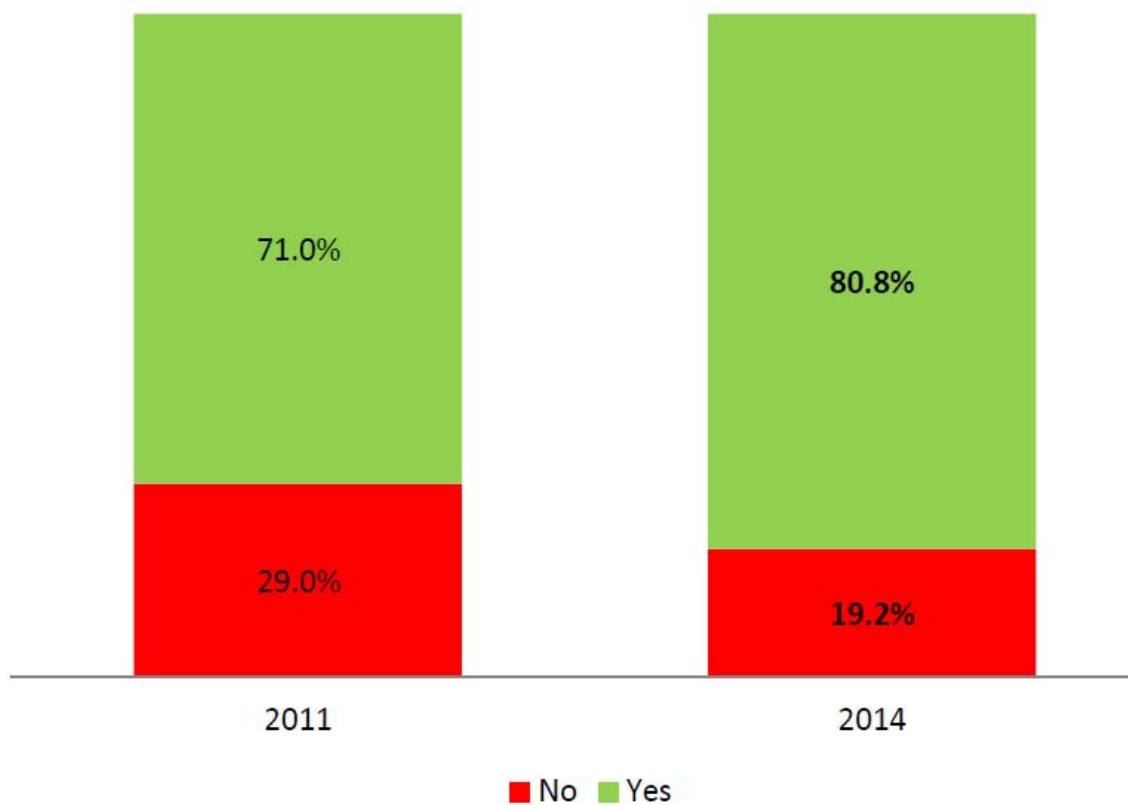
"The Government will continue to manage such shared spaces (with foreign workers), as well as manage the overall numbers to minimise impact on local communities," said the Manpower Minister.

Satisfaction Levels of Foreign Workers



Overall Satisfaction with Working in Singapore

Recommending Singapore as a Place for Work



Recommend Singapore to friends and relatives as a place for work

- CNA/es