

# Power sector on high-voltage drive to attract workers

By GRACE CHUA

POWER generation companies in Singapore are looking for fresh blood.

Some 2,400 new technical professionals will be needed in the power sector over the next 10 years, said Minister in the Prime Minister's Office and Second Minister for Home Affairs and for Trade and Industry S. Iswaran yesterday.

He was speaking at the launch of The Oil & Gas Year publication at the Oasia Hotel in Novena.

The power generation industry literally keeps Singapore running.

But it is not seen by students as being as attractive as the oil and gas sector or clean energy

technologies. "Quite a sizeable cadre" is needed, Mr Iswaran said, because four in 10 of the 4,600 power sector workers in Singapore today will be eligible to retire in the next 10 to 15 years.

In addition, the power generation industry will grow with the economy, especially as liquefied natural gas becomes available to industries from a terminal set to open in the second quarter of this year.

More than 2,000MW of generation capacity, or 20 per cent of current installed capacity, is set to come online in the next few years.

This in turn will lead to an increase in the number of jobs in the industry.

A report released yesterday by

a power sector manpower task-force set up last year has put out recommendations to attract new workers, said Mr Iswaran.

These include scholarships, a centralised training institute, paying competitive wages, and outlining a clear career path.

The report noted that Singapore's maritime and aerospace industries have industry-wide outreach, education and training strategies, and suggested the power industry do the same.

It also noted that students saw the power sector as offering a harsh work environment and being uninteresting, and that they did not understand the sector.

It recommended a sector-wide branding exercise and youth outreach efforts.

Mr Kane Neo, 40, joined Singa-

pore Power as a junior engineer 13 years ago, after hearing his uncle, a power engineer, talk about his job.

The thrill of working with high-voltage lines that were used to transport large amounts of power over long distances was what drew him to the work, he said.

Today, he is a deputy director there, and oversees operations and maintenance for the northern part of Singapore, from Jurong to Punggol.

Mr Neo said that the company's overseas expansion and learning about new technology mean his work is not static, contrary to popular belief about the industry.

"It's always growing," he said.

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