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GIC and Temasek bet on institute to boost growth of wealth management talent pool

by Val Chua
val@newstoday.com.sg

THE Government of Singapore Investment Corporation (GIC) and Temasek Holdings have placed their bet on where they think the big money literally lies — with wealth managers.

To boost Singapore's goal of becoming a wealth management hub, they have seeded "a few million dollars" in an institute which will expand and deepen the talent pool of private bankers and fund managers here and in Asia.

By January next year, the Wealth Management Institute (WMI) will offer a 14-month Masters programme in wealth management, conducted in the Singapore Management University, with expertise from the Swiss Banking School.

Over 30 industry players have lent their support through sponsorship and internship opportunities — including a $1.7 million real-time information service from *Reuters*.

Officially launching the WMI during a Singapore Investment Forum on Friday, Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong noted that talent is the most "critical success factor" for the growth of this burgeoning sector.

"We will train our people to pick up the specific skills and top up our pool of expertise with foreign talent," he told guests at the Ritz-Carlton Millennia, including UOB chairman and CEO Wee Cho Yaw, head of Citigroup Private Bank (Asia-Pacific and Middle East) Mr Deepak Sharma and economist Dr Marc Faber, known as "Dr Doom" for his bearish views.

"We will train our people to pick up specific skills and top up our pool of expertise with foreign talent," said DPM Lee Hsien Loong (left), seen here having lunch with Mr Ken Borda, Asia-Pacific CEO of Deutsche Bank (centre), and Mr Wee Cho Yaw, UOB chairman and CEO (right) at the Wealth Management Institute launch. — TODAY photo by Alvin Toh

Mr Lee's wife, Ms Ho Ching, executive director of Temasek Holdings, was also present during the half-day event — although the high-profile couple, who arrived and left separately, mingled with different groups of people.

Looking elegant in a lime-green top and dark pants, she dined at one table while her husband sat at another.

The couple has been under the international media spotlight after Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong told the *Financial Times* that he did not know if Ms Ho would remain in the government-linked Temasek Holdings when Mr Lee succeeds him as Prime Minister.

Mr Lee "may find it awkward" when questions arise about his wife's job once he takes over the hot seat, PM Goh had said.

But the focus yesterday was on the rising wealth in Asia — and how to capture it.

In his speech, Mr Lee noted that global investors are paying attention to the region again: Asian stock markets have risen by more than 30 per cent from their lows earlier this year.

"The IPO markets are also active, particularly in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore. These four countries have raised almost US$14 billion ($24.2 billion) from IPOs for the first eight months of 2003, as compared with less than US$10 billion for the whole of 2002," he said.

Singapore must quickly rise to "be one of the key financial nodes of a rising Asia", he said, to ride on the region's fast-growing wealth management market, which spans fund management, product-structuring and advisory services.

Locally, there is a potentially "significant domestic market" for fund management services, as Singapore still has one of the highest saving rates in the world, he added.

"The Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) will spare no effort to ensure that a wide range of wealth management products and services are available in Singapore," said Mr Lee, who is also the Finance Minister.

Other new initiatives include a Singapore Exchange-MAS scheme that will give grants for stock broking houses and research firms to provide equity analysis for small and mid-cap stocks.

Despite acknowledging that economic growth would be "firmer from the last quarter of 2003 onwards", Mr Lee said the Government would stick to its revised growth forecast of between zero and one per cent this year. He said: "Things are picking up. But we have not revised our forecast. It stands, for now."

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