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Needy residents get help ahead of Budget measures

By Hoe Yeen Nie, Channel NewsAsia | Posted: 18 January 2009 1936 hrs

SINGAPORE: With the economic downturn, the coming months are likely to be tough for Singaporeans.

But low-income groups are getting some help, ahead of relief measures expected to be announced during Budget Day on Thursday.

On Sunday, MPs fanned out across the island to give residents some help.

At Bedok, Deputy Prime Minister S Jayakumar and his grassroots leaders gave out hong baos and Lunar New Year goodies to needy residents.

Over at Pasir Ris West, Lunar New Year goodies were also given out to 20 families.

Defence Minister Teo Chee Hean, who is also the MP for the area, distributed NTUC shopping vouchers and basic provisions such as rice, cooking oil and coffee powder. These were provided by the Singapore Buddhist Welfare Services.

At Aljunied GRC, a mobility scooter rental service has been making life a little easier for residents like Madam Koh Poh Heok.

For years, the 72-year-old has had difficulty walking due to problems with her spine. Buying a mobile scooter was not an option she could afford.

But thanks to a grassroots scheme at the GRC, she can now rent such a scooter at a fraction of the cost, for just S\$10.50 each month.

Speaking in Mandarin, MP Yeo Guat Kwang said he hopes the scheme will encourage residents with mobility problems to interact more with other residents.

The scheme is the GRC's one of several to help residents. Another scheme provides free breast pumps to needy families.

Over at Sembawang GRC, Health Minister Khaw Boon Wan spent Sunday morning presenting Edusave awards to students from low-income families.

This year, 1,500 recipients received more than S\$380,000 worth of bursaries and scholarships in total.

Mr Khaw said: "After (Lunar) New Year, if joblessness goes up, then we are bound to have some families getting into trouble. But I think children's education shouldn't be neglected."

The coming six months are going to be difficult for many, but Mr Khaw is optimistic that the next half of 2009 will see some signs of recovery.

In the meantime, he said, there will be measures in the Budget to help Singaporeans cope.

- CNA/ir



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Madam Koh Poh Heok trying out the mobile scooter

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