

# Sharp hike in Singapore's unemployment rate

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SINGAPORE: Singapore's unemployment rate jumped to 3.3 per cent in March, up from 2.5 per cent in December 2008, as the global economic downturn took its toll on the city-state's labour market, the Ministry of Manpower said yesterday. The figure was slightly higher than the rate of 3.2 per cent the ministry predicted in April.

With Singapore battling

its worst recession since independence from Malaysia in 1965, about 95,700 Singaporeans were unemployed in March, a third more than in December 2008 when the number was 71,800.

For the first time since 2003 when the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome hit the local economy, total employment in Singapore experienced its first quarterly contraction

in the first three months of 2009, the ministry said.

In the first quarter this year, total employment fell by 6,200 as the number of workers hired was lower than the number of workers who left their jobs.

Due to shrinking external demand, Singapore's manufacturing sector was hit hardest with employment declining by 22,100 in the first quarter this year. — dpa