

**SPEECH BY MR CHAN TEE SENG, SNCF EXCO CHAIRMAN, AT THE SNCF NEW YEAR RECEPTION ON THURSDAY, 15 JANUARY 2008, 6.45PM, AT THE ARENA @CLARKE QUAY**

Our Guest-of-Honour, Dr Balaji Sadasivan, Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs  
& Mrs Balaji

Mr Othman Haron Eusofe, Chairman, SNCF Board of Trustees

Mr S Chandra Das, Chairman, Central Co-operative Fund Committee

Fellow Co-operative Leaders and Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

A very good evening to all of you and welcome to SNCF New Year Reception 2009.

Let me first thank Dr Balaji for kindly gracing this evening's event as our Guest-of-Honour. We are indeed delighted to have you and Mrs Balaji with us.

We receive the New Year with a certain sense of apprehension, with the economic crisis looming. The world is entering the most serious economic crisis in sixty years. As a small, open economy, Singapore cannot avoid being affected.

For the Co-operative Movement, this crisis presents an opportunity for us to convince the public and customers that it pays to do business with co-operatives.

**Strengthen our social capital**

First, we should continue to strengthen our "social capital". In the period of preceding the financial crisis, with record high oil prices and high inflation, NTUC FairPrice stepped forward over and over again to assure the public of the availability and affordability of essential food supplies. It extended its discounts on a basket of essential food products through its house brands and gave out food vouchers to needy families to alleviate the high cost of living. Just two days ago, FairPrice again announced a \$15m aid package to help Singaporeans cope with the financial crisis. This includes a 5% discount on 500 house brand items.

Other co-operatives too, are taking the lead to keep prices affordable, to help Singaporeans ride the crisis.

**Building management capacity**

Next, co-operatives should strengthen themselves and build management capacity.

With the expected slack in the labour market, co-operatives can seize the opportunity to recruit good quality staff to boost its management ranks, which was much harder in the past.

In 2008, the SNCF, together with the Central Co-operative Fund, offered the Co-operative Scholarship to school-leavers to attract them to choose the co-operative sector as a career path. With our pioneer batch of 3 Scholars, SNCF intends to step up this effort and offer more such Scholarships this year.

### **Staying vigilant**

The failure in the recent US financial market has effects that spread out to the entire global economy. One of the reasons for the failure in the system is inadequate regulations and regulatory structures.

Our co-operatives must therefore stay vigilant.

Last September, the Parliament passed the Co-operative Societies (Amendment) Act. To comply with the provisions of the revised Act, our co-operatives are given one year (i.e. from 20 October 2008 to 19 October 2009) to amend their by-laws. SNCF will be working with, and helping co-operatives to comply with these regulations. Of particular attention is the credit co-operatives sector. SNCF has formed a taskforce, under Dr Theyvendran, to identify the issues and help find solutions.

### **Staying relevant**

Our co-operatives must continue to engage the youth, and the younger segment of the population. They are our future generation of leaders and customers. In the year ahead, the Executive Committee will be discussing possible initiatives and programmes to make the co-operative movement more accessible to students in campuses.

For example, there exist various schemes that encourage and fund students to take on entrepreneurship projects, as part of training to promote entrepreneurship. Could we work with the tertiary institutions to encourage them to consider projects that have a social angle? How can we re-energise the campus sector, to get more youth participation? We intend to form a project team, to come up with some recommendations.

The other aspect of staying relevant is about seeding new co-operative initiatives. SNCF has been actively seeking new ideas to support the setting of new co-operative ventures that

make an impact and has a meaningful social role. The CCFC is ready to support worthwhile and viable proposals.

### **Events for 2009**

Come 2009, to meet the new needs of our affiliates, SNCF is ever committed to engage our affiliates more dynamically. In this connection, I would like to share with you some of the upcoming key events of SNCF.

1. **NTUC & SNCF Women's Event in celebration of International Women's Day 2009**  
To celebrate this year's International Women's Day, the Women's Programme Committee of SNCF and NTUC will be jointly an event in March this year. Details will be furnished in due course.
2. **Launch of Shared Services**  
For increased cost effectiveness, SNCF plans to bring in a larger pool of shared services such as directors' liability insurance, audit services, legal services, Secretariat support in areas of book-keeping, etc. Tentatively, we are looking at the launch in March/ April 2009.
3. **Extraordinary General Meeting**  
SNCF will conduct our EOGM in April/ May, primarily to amend the SNCF By-laws to conform to the new Act and improve operational efficiency.
4. **SNCF Anniversary Reception**  
On 3 July this year, SNCF will celebrate our 28<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a Reception. This celebration also marks the 87<sup>th</sup> International Co-operative Day.
5. **Campus Co-operatives Bazaar**  
To encourage and involve our student co-operators, we propose to run a series of programmes, possibly starting this May with a retail management workshop. The skills gained then will definitely come in handy for the highlight which is a Bazaar in August.
6. **Annual Co-operative Leaders' Conference**  
Riding on the success of last year's Bangkok Conference, we are confident of achieving another round of positive outcome at this year's Conference which will be held here on our home ground.

## 7. ICA General Assembly

The ICA General Assembly and related events will be held in Geneva, Switzerland from 16 to 20 November 2009 at the Geneva International Convention Centre.

I look forward to the support from our affiliates for our various programmes. Accordingly, I would appreciate it if affiliates could schedule the dates of their own events around the dates of the key SNCF events.

## **Concluding Remarks**

In the Chinese zodiac, the Ox is no bull in a china shop. Steadfast and solid, this powerful animal is a symbol of a born leader, dependable and possessing an innate ability to achieve great things. There is no painless way to get out of this recession. The problem is how to get the economy going again. The Year of the Ox should bring us, the Co-operative Movement, strength to defend what we have got and to build a better future for our people.

We can achieve this by demonstrating that we, the co-operators, are united in facing up to our problems and are prepared to make the sacrifices to surmount them. Let us sharpen our competitive edge and work with unremitting vigour as we tackle the challenges that lie ahead and make 2009 a reasonable prosperous year.

So finally, may I wish all of you good health and prosperity for 2009. Have an enjoyable evening.