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Employers' CPF Contribution Rate

Time Is Ripe To Have A Relook

To restore or not to restore, that is the question. To NTUC Secretary-General Lim Swee Say's mind, the ground is sweet for at least a partial restoration of the employers' CPF contribution rate from the current 14.5 per cent towards the long term target of 16 per cent.

Referring to the Ministry of Trade and Industry's announcement on 14 April 2010 that Singapore's economy is expected to grow by 7.0 to 9.0 per cent in 2010, and advance estimates indicating that Singapore's GDP expanded strongly by 13.1 per cent on a year-on-year basis in the first quarter of 2010, SG Lim said:

"On the part of the Labour Movement, we feel that given the strong performance of the economy in the first quarter, as well as the healthy outlook for the rest of the year and given the low unemployment situation, this is a good opportunity for us to consider some form of CPF restoration."

He registered this point on the sidelines of a visit to Cameron (Singapore) Pte Ltd on 15 April 2010 to explore Cheaper Better Faster and productivity strategies with management and union.

SG Lim highlighted that the strong economic rebound from the doldrums of the past year reaffirms that Singapore's strategy of cutting costs to save jobs during the downturn was right for both workers and companies: "As a result, if you look at Singapore today, we have the best of both worlds. On the one hand, our unemployment is among the lowest in the world, and at the same time the strength of the rebound is one of the strongest in the world."

He stressed that it is critical to "continue our focus on productivity revival to ensure that the healthy rebound can be sustained for the rest of the year and into 2011 and beyond," and that "it is important that we take full advantage of this strong rebound to strengthen our economic foundation." Importing productivity and innovation best practices from around the world and spreading it quickly, in particular to the SMEs, will go a long way towards that end.

SG Lim noted that "with low unemployment and strong economic performance this year, the wage pressure will be stronger," and workers ought to be rewarded fairly in 2010 given the better economic performance. However, he added: "It is important that we keep our wage system flexible. In other words, not all wage increase should go into the built-in wage increase. Some should continue to be in the form of bonuses, could be mid-year or year-end bonuses. What is important is that we want workers to have a fair share of the gains and yet, at the same time, keep our wages flexible."

That brought SG Lim to the all-important issue of savings for the future: "As we continue to grow our economy and upgrade our productivity, wage pressure will go up and it is important that we don't just put all these wage increases into our pockets and spend them for today."

He reasoned that with increasing life spans there is a need for programmes like CPF LIFE and better healthcare in the future which bear out the importance of healthy CPF accounts. The current total CPF contribution rate is 34.5 per cent, with employers contributing 14.5 per cent and employees 20 per cent. The long term CPF rate target is 36 per cent with employers contributing 16 per cent and employees 20 per cent.

"We feel that this is a good opportunity that we should not let it go past without at least taking another look at this CPF restoration."

NTUC Secretary-General Lim Swee Say

"We urge the Government to take a cautious approach in responding to the Labour Movement's call. Any restoration of the employer CPF contribution rate should be done gradually, to ensure that business recovery at the company level is not derailed."

President of SNEF Stephen Lee

"The Government will consider carefully the call by the Labour Movement to restore the employer CPF contribution rate in view of the strong recovery and robust outlook of Singapore's economy, taking into account employers' concerns on business competitiveness"

Minister for Manpower Gan Kim Yong

"We are not pushing to get there in one step. What is important is that we want to register our appeal that given the climate today, we think this is a good opportunity because looking ahead, we are not so sure when we have another opportunity when we will see strong growth, low unemployment and at the same time a healthy economic outlook."

Recognising that employers would have their concerns, SG Lim said: "What we hope is that the Government will take into consideration the desire of the Labour Movement to take full advantage of this present situation to consider some restoration. At the same time, obviously the Government will have to take into consideration the feedback and sentiments of the business community."

By **Marcus Lin**

UWEEI Adopts 'Kaizen' Culture

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Marine Sector Will Gain From Increased Levy

By
Lim Chin Siew
NTUC Competency Director (Administration)

Many see the increase of the foreign worker levy as necessary to curb the growth of foreign workers to maintain the current level of about one-third of the overall workforce. Employers now have to quickly shift towards productivity-driven growth rather than labour-driven growth.

It is difficult to recruit Singaporeans into the Marine Sector to fill rank-and-file positions like tank cleaners, sand blasters and scaffolders, presently held mostly by foreign workers. In the Marine Sector, foreign worker levy will be increased from the present $150 to $200 for a skilled foreign worker and from $295 to $300 for an unskilled foreign worker. The change differentiates between skilled and unskilled foreign workers, pushing companies to drive up workers' productivity.

Marine companies can explore job redesign or process review to optimise allocation of local and foreign manpower. The quality of foreign workers can be improved through training and up-skilling courses. Workers can also be trained to multi-task.

The increased levy will affect the cost to companies in the short run, but the benefits of increased productivity will more than make up for it in the long run.

Unions in the Marine Sector constantly work with management partners to promote the Cheaper Better Faster initiatives to increase productivity. With the increased levy, employers are strongly urged to step up efforts in increasing productivity and the working life span of workers.

The key is to focus on long-term training for the workers and enhancing re-employment efforts by the companies to avoid over reliance on foreign workers. Employers should reward workers fairly for their contributions to higher productivity.

Apart from the individual skills and abilities enhancement, the unions work hand-in-hand with the management counterpart and/or NTUC to ensure a holistic approach to motivate foreign and local workers. Company-based activities like dinners and family day, as well as NTUC's May Day Activities like family outings and carnivals serve to integrate the foreign workers with the locals to encourage a healthy lifestyle and enhance work-life balance. These will inevitably raise morale, increase productivity and project a better image for Singapore.

Unions in the Marine Sector also look out for errant employers who pass the cost of the increased levy onto the foreign workers, resulting in lower pay and morale. Employers should also avoid taking the easy way out by transferring the costs from the increased levy to customers as this will erode the competitiveness of the company.

With the Government providing funding to cushion the increased business costs, employers actively implementing CBF initiatives and unions urging workers to adjust their mindset, unions in the Marine Sector are confident that the industry will continue to do well and all, from the workers to the companies to Singapore as a country, will benefit from the process.

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SNEF's Response To Call To Restore Employers' CPF Contribution Rate

The Singapore National Employers Federation notes that GDP grew robustly by 13.1 per cent in the first quarter of 2010, compared to the 9.4 per cent decline in the first quarter of 2009 when Singapore was in the thick of a global recession. The Ministry of Trade and Industry has also revised its forecast, raising Singapore's GDP growth to between seven and nine per cent this year. This is a strong rebound from the two per cent decline in GDP in 2009.

The Federation therefore understands why the Labour Movement has called for a restoration in the employer's CPF contribution rate. However, productivity had declined for eight successive quarters before turning positive to three per cent growth in the fourth quarter of 2009. Overall, productivity has declined by more than 10 per cent over the last three years and total wages (i.e. basic wages and bonuses) have exceeded productivity growth for the last five years.

As such, the overall unit labour cost (ULC) has risen for four straight years from 2005 to 2008. The ULC declined only slightly by 0.1 per cent in 2009. From July, employers will have to bear the higher foreign worker levies that were announced by Government earlier. There are still some downside risks to a sustained economic recovery. Any increase in the employer CPF rate will add to fixed wage costs and affect all companies regardless of their state of recovery. It will impact the ULC and can hurt our cost competitiveness.

Going forward, raising productivity to mitigate higher business costs will be crucial. President of SNEF Stephen Lee said: "We urge the Government to take a cautious approach in responding to the Labour Movement's call. Any restoration of the employer CPF Contribution rate should be done gradually, to ensure that business recovery at the company level is not derailed. An increase in the employer CPF contribution rate will raise the total wage costs and also impact the basic wage adjustment this year as employers will take the increase into account. There should be adequate lead time to any restoration so that employers can make the necessary adjustments."

MOM Maps Out Strategies

By
Marcus Lin

Four key areas have been identified by Manpower Minister Gan Kim Yong as critical in the transformation of Singapore's economy and the national drive to raise productivity and innovation to foster a productive workforce and workplaces in Singapore. Mr Gan shared the Ministry of Manpower's strategic directions for 2010 and beyond at its inaugural Workplan Seminar on 12 April 2010 at the Orchid Country Club.

Helping the workforce raise productivity through Continuing Education and Training

Mr Gan said: "CET has always been a key thrust in MOM. Over the last few years, we have built a strong foundation of CET infrastructure, which has helped cushion the impact of the recent recession by taking in workers for training and upgrading. We will continue to build up and strengthen our CET landscape so that workers will have more opportunities to improve themselves and raise their productivity."

MOM will be working with the Singapore Workforce Development Agency to expand the scope of the CET system to serve a wider range of workers including PMETs (Professionals, Managers, Executives and Technical people).The quality of CET providers and the competency of trainers will also be enhanced.

Mr Gan also announced that the Workforce Skills Qualification system will be included in the Singapore Standard Educational Classification as a qualification achievement from this year onwards.

Developing a more targeted programme to help Small and Medium Enterprises raise productivity

Mr Gan said: "WDA will work with SPRING to help them raise their knowledge and capabilities through productivity training programmes that take into account circumstances and challenges faced by the SMEs. These programmes will equip their supervisors and workers with the knowledge and tools they need to improve productivity at their workplaces. We will also provide training programmes, customised workshops and diagnostic tools to help SME CEOs and managers to implement productivity measures in their enterprises."

Mr Gan added that ways and means to provide higher funding support for SMEs to take up the upcoming productivity-related courses will also be announced next month. MOM will also work with SPRING and various industry associations like the Association of Small to Medium Enterprises and the various Enterprise Development Centres to develop sector specific initiatives that will benefit SMEs across the entire sector.

Artist's Impression of the One-Stop Customer Service Centre at Bendemeer.

New One-Stop Centre

MOM will be setting up a One-stop Customer Service Centre at Bendemeer Road by 2012. The new centre will consolidate MOM's services for issues relating to foreign manpower, labour relations and workplaces, as well as occupational safety and health which are currently located at three different locations. The Workplace Safety and Health Council will also be located there. MOM will adopt a customer-centric and innovative approach in the design of the new centre and its work processes so as to be more productive and effective.

Paying special attention to low-wage and older workers to help them raise their skills and take on higher value jobs over time

Mr Gan said: "This way, they can also benefit from the overall productivity improvements and we can then achieve inclusive growth. As announced last month, MOM has enhanced the Workfare Income Supplement Scheme and will introduce a new Workfare Training Scheme. The enhancements to the WIS will help to supplement workers' incomes and also further build up their CPF savings.

"The new WTS serves to complement the WIS by encouraging low-wage workers to upgrade their skills and to incentivise their employers to send them for training. We will roll out the WTS on 1 July 2010. MOM will work with our partners such as WDA and NTUC's e2i (Employment and Employability Institute) to reach out to low-wage workers and encourage them to apply for WTS so that they can benefit from training."

Continue strengthening tripartite partnerships and leveraging on the partners to drive productivity, especially in promoting skills training and innovative workplace practices

Mr Gan said: "Strong tripartite collaboration had helped us weather the downturn; and this close relationship between employers, unions and the Government is now crucial in helping us run faster in our journey to improve productivity. MOM will work closely with NTUC through the Cheaper Better Faster movement to spread the productivity message by reaching out directly to employers and workers, and provide them with assistance and support on the ground to implement productivity improvements at the enterprise level."

Going Cheaper Better Faster To Benefit All

By
Muneerah Bee Mohamed Iqbal

A number of branches of the Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering Employees' Union have been a sterling example of being Cheaper Better Faster and the union has been working very closely with managements on such initiatives.

Keppel Shipyard, for example, was mentioned in the Labour Movement Workplan Seminar 2010 for its safety productivity with its Integrated Safety Training Complex, the first in the marine industry in Singapore. With this new facility, workers can be trained there instead of onboard a ship. This in-house training option is less time consuming and a more productive channel to train workers on safety in the shipyard.

Most recently, Cameron (Singapore) Pte Ltd also shared their CBF Learning Journey with NTUC Secretary-General Swee Say and other NTUC officials on 15 April 2010. Working with SMEEU, the company has invested in Research and Development to enhance technical capability and implemented company-wide business improvement processes.

Considering the rapid progress of our neighbouring countries, SMEEU President Wong Weng Ong said it is important for the marine and shipyard industry to be productive and competitive. He cautioned: "In the shipyard industry, other countries such as China and Korea are coming up. They want to move faster than us but we have to move ahead of them. We cannot lag behind. Once we cannot compete with them, we are in trouble."

Mr Wong highlights that engaging in CBF initiatives and being productive will also result in rewards and incentives for workers as well. He cited Keppel Shipyard, where workers received a nine-month productivity bonus. He said: "By embarking on CBF projects, companies can improve and be better off from the last couple of years. I definitely think if the company makes an active profit, the management will share the piece of cake among all the employees."

According to Mr Wong, about 65 per cent of workers in the marine industry are foreign workers. Being far away from home without their families, the union plays an important role in rendering help to them when they need it. "Some of these workers sold away their properties and took loans just to come to Singapore and work. We tell them if anything happens to them here, they can turn to the union for help and we also encourage our foreign members to work hard. With benefits such as NTUC Gift, union membership gives them a peace of mind," he explained.

SMEEU

Formed in 1981, the Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering Employees' Union currently has more than 10,000 members across 43 companies. 25 to 30 per cent of which are foreign workers and a big bulk of them comes from the shipyard sector.

UWEEI Rides On The 'Kaizen' Culture

By
Naseema Banu Maideen

The 'Kaizen' culture of continuous quality improvement which forms the heartbeat of many manufacturing companies will be adopted by the United Workers of Electronic and Electrical Industries. UWEEI has always advocated many practices that improve work processes within the organisation. At UWEEI's Workplan and Cluster Dialogue session on 31 March 2010, it further stamped its commitment and became the first union to embark on an organisation-wide 'Kaizen' transformation journey that will complement the Labour Movement's beat to achieve a Cheaper Better Faster workforce.

As a union that champions workers from one of the worst hit industries during the economic crisis last year, UWEEI also made a commendable achievement with a membership breakthrough of 53,500. This was an increase from the membership pool of 52,485 in 2009.

Its commitment to adopt the 'Kaizen' culture will enable UWEEI to serve its members more effectively. Said NTUC Deputy Secretary-General and UWEEI Executive Secretary Halimah Yacob: "Taking on this 'Kaizen' culture in full force is really about transformation of mindsets where every individual takes ownership for improvements within the organisation. UWEEI will bring all on board this journey towards continuous improvement, from our staff to Executive Committee members and management partners."

This journey sets UWEEI leading the Cheaper Better Faster drive for its unionised branches."As we encourage companies to continue to enhance their productivity to be cheaper, enhance their capabilities to be better and improve their flexibility to be faster, UWEEI will also continuously improve our internal processes and live up to this culture in all aspects of our workplan. This will enable us to serve our members better," added DSG Halimah.

With the 'Kaizen' drive in place, UWEEI will also sharpen its focus on membership, leadership and Cheaper Better Faster wagons. DSG Halimah said that UWEEI will work with 15 companies this year to implement Cheaper Better Faster initiatives which will bring about productivity improvements, benefiting both workers and employers. When it comes to strengthening its current membership base of 53,000, UWEEI will adopt a systematic, cluster approach.

"As it reaches out to new members, UWEEI will also strive to maintain our existing membership pool. This year, we will group our branches into different clusters and by clustering, we hope to strengthen our bond with our members through a spread of events," said NTUC Vice-President and UWEEI General Secretary Cyrille Tan.

With the profile of manufacturing workers shifting away from rank-and-file levels to PMETs (Professionals, Managers, Executives and Technical people) levels, UWEEI will intensify its efforts to fill some gaps in addressing the needs of this pool to attract them into the Labour Movement, he added.

UWEEI will be exploring areas of providing career advancement opportunities and training programmes as value-add for these members.

From Left: UWEEI Deputy Executive Secretary Ong Keau, UWEEI President Francis Lim and NTUC Deputy Secretary-General and UWEEI Executive Secretary Halimah Yacob

Office Administration
- Set up an internal 'Kaizen' suggestion scheme, forming a 'Kaizen' team to improve on processes and systems, gather feedback from branch committee on continuous improvements.

Employability
- Engage 15 companies on Cheaper Better Faster projects
- Engage companies to send workers for the Skills Re-development Programme with a target to fill 2,000 training places
- Engage companies to re-skill 100 workers
- Provide job matching for retrenched workers

Membership
- Adopt a cluster approach to reach out to existing and potential members
- Achieve membership targets of 56,500 by 31 March 2011 and eventually 60,000 by 31 March 2012
- Organise five new branches and 50 roadshows for existing branches
- Retain members through positive discrimination such as tie-ups to hold events like the IT bazaar and provide corporate discounts
- Motivate recruiters through Membership Awards

Industrial Relations
- Strengthen Labour Management Relations by engaging Chief Executive Officers and Managing Directors through 16 plant tours or gatherings and hold two CEO luncheons
- Regular sharing of Industrial Relations cases
- Organise General Convention of Delegates, union management forum and cluster dialogue.

Leadership
- Conduct core leadership training for branch officials with a target to fill 85 training places
- Conduct enhancement programmes with 150 training places
- Groom 30 new branch officials

PMETs
- Launch of professional engineering chapter to build professional engineering community
- Push for limited representation for executives in 20 branches
- Recruit 2,000 new PMETs as members
- Conduct talks on employment rights and expand movies interest group

No-Collar
- Work with contract suppliers and conduct roadshows to recruit 300 new members
- Form a No Collar champion group and organise networking session

Youth
- Implement a customised PCK (Personal Attributes, Commitment and Knowledge) programme run for five youth activists and 30 new leaders
- Recruit new members through a spread of networking activities such as Young UWEEI bashes

Re-employment of Older Workers
- Engage and work with 20 companies to formalise re-employment of older worker policy according to tripartite guidelines and help at least one company to put in place sustainable and scalable re-employment initiatives
- Equip branch officials with knowledge on re-employment issues
- Promote health and financial awareness with U Live

Women
- Engage five companies to embark on Back-To-Work Women's Programme
- Encourage three companies to come on board Little Ones @ Work programme
- Organise activities across various interest groups
- Recruit more members through organised activities for various interest groups

Quality Worklife
- Recruit more members in various events like walking club activities, sports, health talks, educational and recreational tours

Publicity
- Revamp website to enhance user-friendliness
- Expand UWEEI's facebook community

Hitachi To Hit High Productivity Levels

An operator is now trained to now operate eight machines in the Computed Numerically Controlled machine sections in the new plant, unlike in the past in the plant in Bedok.

By **Naseema Banu Maideen**

With the Labour Movement setting the pace for a Cheaper Better Faster economy, Hitachi Chemical (Singapore) Private Limited was quick to pick up on this speed for its printed circuit boards business. Working closely with the United Workers of Electronic and Electrical Industries, the company rolled out a plant consolidation project in 2009 that targeted at enhancing both the hardware - machineries - and the software - workforce - of the company.

Hitachi Chemical Singapore, a leading printed circuit boards manufacturer has two plants in Bedok and Loyang. In 2009, the company centralised its business operations by relocating its plant in Bedok to a new, second plant in Loyang. This US$40 million project has enabled the company to maintain competitiveness with cost reductions that are brought about by operational efficiencies and productivity improvements. At the same time, workers across all levels have enjoyed training opportunities for new skills to handle new products and new machines.

On the average, the company hopes to achieve total productivity enhancements of 21 per cent with its centralising efforts; gradually, it aims to hit about 5 to 10 per cent improvements in productivity for the next three years.

Said Mr Tay Koh Pheng, General Manager, Operation Division, Hitachi Chemical Singapore: "Our printed circuit boards, which are used to mechanically support and electrically connect electronic components, are all custom-made in this industry. This means that they cannot be built in advance and production lead time is very important. With the merging of both plants, we will be able to save cost and deliver our products faster with shorter lead time. We are able to share land capacity more effectively and are able to optimise our resources."

The Software

Mr Tay highlighted that investing in these plant consolidations with new automation facilities has brought new business opportunities with the birth of two new products - a thin layered High Density Interconnect board used widely in miniaturised products and a more than 30 layered advanced printed circuit board used in the manufacture of computer systems. The company has invested in new machines with advance technology and capability to meet these new products' requirements.

"The old machine in Bedok required six operators to run it while the new machine requires only two operators. The installations of more advanced capability machines have also helped improve efficiency. We now work with better machines and better training. There is no need for manual operations and our key role is to check for consistency on quality," said Mr Tiong Keng San, 46, a technician who works in the Hot Press section.

A new training centre will also be set up here later this year to train more workers. "While the technology is already used in the headquarters in Japan, developments on the transfer of the technology are still ongoing in our plants here and intensive training is very crucial. We will be providing systematic and customised training for all levels of our workforce," said Mr Tay.

The Hardware

Investments on the re-layouts in the Computed Numerically Controlled machines sections have also upped productivity levels. One operator was tasked to run six machines in the plant in Bedok; in the new plant, one operator can handle eight machines. Mr Tay explained that Hitachi Chemical's Cheaper Better Faster strategies focused on both enhancing machine and labour productivity. He summed up: "Achieving total productivity is not just about buying the best machines that are available in the market. What value-adds is equipping our employees with the best skills and best training."

Technicians in the Hitachi Chemical's Hot Press section of the new Loyang plant like Mr Tiong Keng San now have less manual job duties and have been trained to perform quality inspection with advanced technology.

Better Workers, Better Technologies

"UWEEI has always maintained strong Labour Management Relations with the company. This year, as the company is moving towards innovation to achieve productivity, it has also constantly explored all ways to upgrade the workers to handle the new products and technologies."

Richard Tan, UWEEI General Treasurer and Branch Chairman of Hitachi Chemical (Singapore) Private Limited

Free NTUC Income Coverage For Needy Families

Low-income families with young children are getting a helping hand from Labour Movement Social Enterprise NTUC Income Insurance Co-operative Ltd with the launch of a free insurance scheme on 9 April 2010.

Called the Income Family Micro-Insurance Scheme (IFMIS), it will pay out $5,000 in the event the main caregiver passes away or becomes totally and permanently disabled. It is expected to benefit 13,000 low-income households with young children and is expected to cost NTUC Income up to $500,000 for the next three years.

Helping youth and disadvantaged children has been a central theme to NTUC Income's Corporate Social Responsibility programme and the insurer remains committed to this cause in the coming years.

IFMIS will cover recipients of ComCare GROW schemes administered by the five Community Development Councils (CDCs), which come under the purview of the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports. The schemes which will benefit from IFMIS are Centre-based Financial Assistance Scheme for Child Care, Kindergarten Financial Assistance Scheme and the Student Care Fee Assistance programmes. About 18,000 children from 13,000 families currently benefit from these schemes.

No application is required to join this Scheme, as the insurance cover is automatically extended to active recipients under the applicable ComCare GROW schemes. The Scheme is renewable every year and does not involve underwriting, a waiting period, or exclusion of pre-existing illnesses.

Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports, said at the launch: "NTUC Income has continued to demonstrate how a social enterprise can deliver good business results and at the same time, bring about positive social outcomes. The Scheme launched this evening is a fine example of NTUC Income innovatively translating its business results to benefits for needy and disadvantaged families."

NTUC Income will be working with the CDCs over the upcoming months to make available more details of the Scheme and raise awareness among the recipients of the ComCare GROW schemes.

With regard to IFMIS, NTUC Income Chief Executive Tan Suee Chieh said that the company launched the Scheme as part of its commitment to helping the community, and also to mark its 40th anniversary this year.

"There are many worthy causes in Singapore to support but NTUC Income is directing its help towards children and youth, especially those from low income families. These are uncertain times and a needy family losing a primary caregiver is likely to result in a crisis," he said.

"To help these households, NTUC Income married its core expertise in insurance with a desire to help families in a crisis. We believe that we were able to bring our expertise to bear through this Scheme," he added.

This year, NTUC Income will contribute close to $3 million towards charity, community projects and NTUC-related projects. When the financial crisis was in full effect in 2009, it was widely reported that many organisations planned to cut back in their contributions to charity. NTUC Income, on the other hand, decided it was during tough times that it had to help those who needed assistance most. NTUC Income then committed $1 million to help families of retrenched and low income workers under NTUC's Labour Movement U Care Fund in 2009.

My First Skool Goes To Choa Chu Kang

By
Muneerah Bee Mohamed Iqbal

Parents and pre-schoolers at NTUC First Campus My First Skool at Block 212 Choa Chu Kang Central can look forward to more exciting activities involving the community. These activities are a part of the Community Partnership Programme between Choa Chu Kang Constituency and NTUC First Campus. At the launch on 9 April 2010, Minister for Manpower and Member of Parliament for Choa Chu Kang Constituency Gan Kim Yong, who is also the Honorary Education Advisor for the CPP, said: "My First Skool plays an important role in the community in providing childcare and pre-school education. As an Advisor to the community grassroots organisations, it is important for me to be involved and engaged in My First Skool and provide input on the needs of the community as we want have more interaction between the school and the community."

Mr Gan suggested having some joint activities such as a joint Sports Day between PAP Community Foundation kindergarten and My First Skool so that the children can mingle and interact. He explained: "This will also provide an opportunity for teachers from both centres to meet, and by getting to know each other we can learn and share our experiences. The main objective is to improve the quality of education and childcare services for our pre-schoolers here in the Choa Chu Kang community and we hope to do so by such interactions."

My First Skool

Minister for Manpower and MP for Choa Chu Kang constituency Gan Kim Yong building a stronger community in Choa Chu Kang through CPP.

Mr Low Wai Keong, 41, who lives across the street from My First Skool at Choa Chu Kang Central has been sending his 2-year-old daughter, Low Zhi Xin, to the centre for the past month. He is positive that the CPP will allow more exposure for residents to know about the centre and its activities. "Through the activities lined up, it also helps my daughter improve her learning curve through more exposure to the community," he added.

Businesses And Unions Work On Racial Harmony

By **Aaron Neo**
NTUC Senior Industrial Relations Officer

General Secretaries from all of NTUC's 63 unions were invited to the 3rd Businesses and Unions Cluster Workshop under the Community Engagement Programme (CEP) on 24 March 2010.

Launched in 2006, the CEP seeks to develop networks of trust amongst the different communities in Singapore and to build social resilience against the strains and tensions that would follow after a crisis.

Under the CEP, the Businesses and Unions Cluster aims to achieve this by reaching out to workplaces through our strong tripartite networks. A Tripartite Panel on Community Engagement at Workplaces was established to provide overall leadership and make recommendations for the implementation of CEP at workplaces.

At the Cluster Workshop, Minister for Manpower and Chairman for the Tripartite Panel on Community Engagement at Workplaces, Mr Gan Kim Yong, joined 130 community leaders from tripartite partner organisations in discussion and dialogue. Key representatives from SBF, SNEF, NTUC, ASME, SCCCI, SMCCI, SICCI, foreign chambers of commerce, as well as managers of foreign worker dormitories networked and discussed how to develop workplaces that are socially cohesive and crisis-prepared.

Deputy Secretary-General Halimah Yacob represented NTUC to receive a token of appreciation in recognition of the unions' contributions to promoting socially resilient and crisis-prepared workplaces. Speaking as a panelist at the dialogue session, DSG Halimah shared her views about the journey forward for CEP in the Businesses and Unions Cluster, and the need to deepen the engagement of workplaces on implementing CEP.

Deputy Secretary-General Halimah Yacob (right) represented NTUC to receive a token of appreciation from Minister for Manpower Gan Kim Yong.

"Having or celebrating Racial Harmony Day is insufficient to inculcate the necessary values that workers need to adopt. It is more important that the commitment to racial harmony is a part of the organisation's core values so that they would be internalised and permeate in all its activities and programmes," said DSG Halimah.

As the Businesses and Unions Cluster continues to build socially harmonious and secure workplaces, DSG Halimah affirmed that the unions will continue to play a pivotal role in the CEP: "The unions have been a strong partner in the CEP. We would be more than happy to continue doing so and to take the lead in initiatives that the management wants to implement, especially with unionised companies."

CIAS And CIASEU Push On With **Productivity**

By
Achaibar Gupta
NTUC Senior Industrial Relations Officer

Changi International Airport Services and its union CIASEU have much in common but one that stands out is Productivity. It is little wonder that the theme for the 2nd Union-Management workshop held on 28 March 2010 was 'Together for Higher Productivity - Our Goal!!'

A total of 45 participants from both union and management set aside their weekend for a Cheaper Better Faster workshop from 27 to 29 March 2010. Responding to the call by the Labour Movement and the Government on enhancing productivity for workers for sustained employability, management and union leaders shared on current issues and challenges facing the company.

With global competition and the possibility of a third ground handling company, both management and unionists agreed with NTUC Secretary-General Lim Swee Say's call that Singapore needs to be "better than those who are cheaper than us and cheaper than those who are better than us" which relates very well with the current situation for the company.

CIAS CEO Georgie Ong highlighted the effects of the downturn on the company with the reduction in passenger, meals and cargo volume. With the help of the union which had supported the management in various cost-cutting measures including shorter work month and wage cuts for management, and Government assistance like the Jobs Credit Scheme, tax and rental relief, CIAS managed to ride out the crisis quickly.

CIAS has since seen positive growth in its various business divisions which could not happen without the support of the workers, union and management. Mr Ong put it positively: "This CBF Workshop clearly shows our commitment towards raising higher productivity. It's not just a management goal or the union's goal alone, but 'Our' goal!!"

At the end of the discussions, both management and union leaders agreed to commit to three key areas: work process enhancements; training and retraining of staff so that they can be multi-skilled; and investing in automation and technology to enhance the productivity of workers.

CIASEU President Sheik Muhammad thanked CIAS management for working towards enhancing productivity for workers. He added that ideas shared are from active participation of Exco Members and Delegates and management staff in the workshop.

"CIAS is our second home. Through the strong working partnership between union and management, we want to make this second home stronger and better," said Mr Poh Pong Sai, an Equipment Operator in the Ground and Cargo Services Division and CIASEU Exco Member who has been with the company for 18 years.

Mr Ong added: "Through this CBF Workshop, we hope to see a fresh flow of ideas and suggestions that will help CIAS and its workers reduce costs or wastages and be more efficient and effective in the delivery of services to our customers. This will also result in higher skilled workers, lower unit costs and with improved profits, higher rewards for our workers."

In appreciation of the union's and employees' support, CIAS management responded quickly when the company began to stabilise in the last quarter of last year and early this year. It gave a lump sum of $180 in lieu of wage increment to all employees for staying the course with the company during the downturn. The management staff's wage cuts were also restored.

Mentoring To Bring Out The Best

By
Vanessa Teo

"Five years ago, we were entrusted by Minister Lim Boon Heng, the then NTUC Secretary-General, to set up a unit but we weren't sure how to go about doing it. So I sat down with Jenny Chim, and she asked me what should we do. I told her 'I don't know, let's think of a way'," shared NTUC Competency Director (Industrial Relations Mentoring) Jessie Yeo at the IRM graduation ceremony on 6 April 2010.

A Happy Occasion… The 5th batch of IROs graduated on 6 April 2010.

And from that uncertain picture at the start, the IRM unit slowly progressed to a unit with a sharp focus that has so far seen five batches of Industrial Relations Officers graduate successfully under their care. This mentoring arm of the Labour Movement family seeks to bring out the best in each IRO.

As IRM Master Mentor Jenny Chim shares: "The main objectives of the IRM unit are simple. We want to help new IROs quickly settle into the Labour Movement family, develop them and accelerate their learning experience so that they can have a more rounded and complete IR experience within a short period of time. We also want to provide a platform where IROs can share experiences and reinforce learning with one another, and also not forgetting to handhold them and help address their concerns. With the IRM unit, we also hope to create a platform for the younger IROs to build a strong network and peer support group for each other."

Indeed, the objectives of the IRM unit were met and young IROs greatly benefitted from this platform to learn and share. As each batch graduates, they display a strong bond with their peers and many spoke about how they found their direction and passion through the IRM unit.

"I've learnt a lot from the training sessions conducted by the IRM unit such as on the different Employment Acts. This is very important to me because as a fresh graduate, I don't have any experience in this area so the mentoring sessions were very useful," said Sabrina Liow, a United Workers of Electronics and Electrical Industries IRO. IRO Gerald Tan from the Food, Drinks and Allied Workers' Union also shared the same sentiments. He said: "The IRM unit creates an important platform for us to voice our concerns off official means. In informal sessions conducted by the IRM unit, we can actually speak our mind and that actually helps us address our fears and uncertainties."

At the end of the day, guests enjoyed a skit painstakingly put together by the graduating IROs, depicting the challenges they face in their job.

The Strength Of The Labour Movement

SISEU Industrial Relations Officer Jason Wong (right) with NTUC Secretary-General Lim Swee Say

"50 years ago, I cannot imagine having a group of IROs who only went through six months to a year of handholding to be able to digest everything they learn, and at the same time come up with a very simple and insightful script today. This shows that they truly understood what we went through last year and are also all geared up for the challenges we face today. And I will say that this is the strength of the Labour Movement."

NTUC Secretary-General Lim Swee Say, who was also the special guest at the IRM graduation ceremony.

Truly, A Winning Collaboration

By
Nicolette Yeo

Most people would get an adrenaline rush soaking in the sights and sounds at the spanking new Resorts World Sentosa. But for the Employment and Employability Committee who visited RWS on 19 April 2010, the thrills were of a different kind.

"I was driving into Resorts World Sentosa the other day with my colleague. She said: 'Eh, I remember that girl. That's the lady I interviewed, screened and sent for training, and today, I see her working here'. She was very excited and proud that the lady had been able to up herself to the level of sophistication needed in this new type of service," shared NTUC e2i (Employment and Employability Institute) Deputy Chief Executive Officer Gilbert Tan, who went along for the learning journey.

This story is one of many that hit home the true value of NTUC e2i's ongoing collaboration with the Singapore Workforce Development Agency and the two Integrated Resorts. So far, the tie-up has led to nearly 1,600 jobseekers trained at NTUC's e2i, with over 600 placed at Resorts World Sentosa. Mr Tan added that the experience has made him "confident that what we prescribe actually works".

EEC Committee Chairman Lim Kuang Beng said that the visit presented a good opportunity for its members to gain an insight into the IR employment situation. "Resorts World is new; the jobs here are quite unique. We brought our committee here so that they can see for themselves the kind of jobs and the service quality standards. One thing that interests them is that not all of the workers are full-time; some are students because a lot of part-timers are needed to supplement.

"Whatever they learn, they can bring back to their unions. NTUC's e2i has done a great job because they have given a lot of information for the leaders to bring back. Hopefully, when they are in need of the services of NTUC's e2i, their companies and workers know where to find it."

To date, 64 joint job fairs and industry previews for the IRs have been held. Efforts will continue as the IRs will need more workers when they become fully operational later on.

A Good Job Creator

"Resorts World is going to create a lot of jobs. I heard that once they are fully operational, they will need about 10,000 permanent staff, plus 30,000 on an ad-hoc basis. It is a job creation industry."

Pritam Singh, Singapore Port Workers Union First Deputy General Secretary

Exceptional Service Quality

"It is very nice to see staff explaining everything and who know what's happening in the whole place. It is good that they are trained in this way. When I was at this place, two tourists came and this lady said, 'This place is closed but if you like, you can go to the Egyptian restaurant'. She also took the trouble to explain what food they had. Last time, if I went to one place and asked about another place, the staff will say, 'I don't know'."

Rajendran s/o Govindarajoo, Chemical Industries Employees' Union President

The next job fair with RWS for Food & Beverage positions will take place on 20 April 2010 at NTUC e2i's campus at 141 Redhill Road. Interested applicants can call NTUC e2i's hotline at 6474 3777, from 9am to 6pm on weekdays.

Fighter

More Than Just A Job

By
Vanessa Teo

"It was just a job to me. There was a vacancy and I was recommended to the job so I just took it. I didn't know anything about NTUC then," explained NTUC Membership Department Members Services Officer Eileen Ng. And that began Madam Ng's journey with the Labour Movement in 2001. However, her perception of the organisation very quickly changed from "it's just a job" to "this is such a meaningful job". Today, she serves passionately at NTUC's membership service counter, doing her best to satisfy members' needs.

"When I began my job it was very challenging for me because I didn't know anything, from products to the mission of NTUC. As I slowly learnt about how NTUC fervently works for workers, I found this job very meaningful and am very contented to be given the chance to play a role in this organisation," said Madam Ng.

Being at the front line, Madam Ng has her fair share of challenges when it comes to handling members. Despite meeting members who can be a little more difficult, she understands it is part and parcel of the job and chooses to focus on happy experiences.

Vanessa Teo

Madam Ng shared: "There is this particular customer who will come to us every six months to renew his road tax, and coincidentally, I am always the one serving him. So when he came last week, I greeted him with a smile and asked 'sir, you are here to renew your road tax?' He was surprised that I could still remember him and gave me a very good compliment. The fact that he could remember me for my service attitude made me very happy, and it is moments as such that give me satisfaction in my job."

In order to serve members best, Madam Ng sees it as a must to have sound product knowledge. Thus she makes an effort to keep herself updated with the latest happenings at NTUC. "Some of our members ask for very detailed answers, and they want it fast. So our product knowledge must be at our fingertips. For example, at NTUC recruitment road shows you will have many people coming up to you to ask for information so there is no time for you to flip through brochures or files. We know we have succeeded in providing the correct information when potential members at the road shows come back to join us as members, and that is my goal," said Madam Ng.

Having journeyed with the Labour Movement for nine years, membership recruitment has become one with Madam Ng, and the topic of membership always surfaces at conversations. "When I am with my family members, I will always share my membership benefits with them. This is just part of me and the topic of membership comes out very naturally. I sometimes even share membership benefits with my neighbours to explain to them that the $9 membership fee will be worth every cent if they use the card the right way," she said.

Moving forward, Madam Ng hopes to see the membership figures increase by leaps and bounds, and will continue to serve members with all her heart to achieve this. She said: "I will go the extra mile to keep our members satisfied, and even if it means doing things outside our job duties. As once our members are satisfied, we will then be able to retain them and grow our membership base."

Union Square Moves Up

NTUC Club's Union Square clubhouse has moved up, literally. For many years located on Level 2 of The Amara Shopping Centre in Tanjong Pagar, it has moved up to Level 5 and it marked the move with a gathering for unionists, staff and friends on 13 April 2010 at the new refurbished premises.

Chief Executive Officer Yeo Khee Leng thanked NTUC Club staff and all others involved for the smooth transition: "We were able to make this place up and running within super quick time and, in fact, we hardly skipped a beat moving into this facility."

Known as one of the best Salsa clubs in Singapore, Union Square is now open seven days a week after undergoing a major facelift. The management hopes to further enhance the Salsa experience that Union Square is renowned for. Voted Best Salsa Club in 2008, Union Square has DJs and live bands from Latin America playing Salsa music for dance enthusiasts.

Guest- of- honour NTUC President John De Payva said NTUC Club is one of the "pillars that make things happen in the social aspects of the Labour Movement." He told the gathering: "What is important is we take note of how our Labour Movement has progressed. We take note of how we have managed the social aspects of the Labour Movement to bring additional fun, gaiety and social life to our union leaders, our union members, our spouses and friends. We want to move more. We want to go a few steps further. And that can only happen if you tell us what kinds of improvements you want us to have."

He also could not resist the opportunity to promote union membership: "For those of you who are full-time here, your extended role is to sign up all the salsa members because they are all PMETs (Professionals, Managers, Executives and Technical people), young urban professionals. Encourage them to be union members," and adding that PMET union membership is important for the future, credibility and relevance of the Labour Movement in Singapore.

PMETs Learn Membership Perks

By
Muneerah Bee
Mohamed Iqbal

When Mr Randy Koh, 39, accompanied his wife, who is a NTUC member, to watch `Clash Of The Titans' at Orchard Cineleisure, it was more than a typical outing for the couple. On 1 April 2010, NTUC Membership Department invited about 280 fresh new members to the special screening to introduce them to membership benefits. Targeting PMETs (Professionals, Managers, Executives and Technical people) above 36 years old, they were also treated to a scrumptious dinner reception. Adding on to the lively atmosphere, media personality and host Daniel Ong conducted games and quizzed contestants on the various membership benefits.

"NTUC is excited and committed to enhance the worklife quality of our members. We hope through this special movie event, members will feel connected to us in terms of our product offerings and being focused on their interests and causes. We hope to provide more members exclusives in the future to continue to strengthen our relations with them," said Loh Kian Hin, NTUC Membership Assistant Director.

Besides lifestyle membership benefits, the new members were also introduced to PMET workplace representation in areas such as unfair termination or dismissal, breach of contract of service, victimisation and eligibility for retrenchment benefits. PMETs looking for upgrading and re-skilling can also enjoy subsidies of up to 90 per cent for training courses and enjoy savings of up to $200 for specialised PMET courses at NTUC LearningHub Pte Ltd. They can also look forward to bond-free scholarships from institutions such as UniSIM, Management Development Institute Of Singapore and Singapore Accountancy Academy.

Randy Koh

Through the event, Mr Koh has certainly learned a lot about the value of NTUC membership. "I learned that with NTUC membership, I can get good insurance coverage so I probably would want to sign up," he said.

Thank You And Welcome

"This NTUC new members' movie evening seeks to appeal to the interests of PMETs. Being a NTUC member will enable PMETs to enjoy a wide level of lifestyle benefits in relation to entertainment, dining and other interest-based activities. We are delighted to have this overwhelming response from our new members to participate in this event and look forward to more PMETs joining us as members."

Daren Kang, NTUC Membership Deputy Director

ntuc

20% discount for Priority Booking NTUC members

(till 30 April 2010)

Applicable for Cat 1 - 3 ticket

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Striking It Big

NTUC Club Forms Largest Dedicated Bowling Network

By **Vanessa Teo**

Well Done UWEEI… A UWEEI representative receives the fourth prize from NTUC Club Chief Executive Officer Yeo Khee Leng.

TYN 20/20

Imagine having 10,000 fellow bowling enthusiasts gathered together in a bowling community where they can interact, exchange tips and pit their skills against each other in friendly matches? That is exactly what NTUC Club aims to achieve by this year, that is, to have 10,000 active members in its newly introduced community. The new sporting community, U Bowling, was introduced on 10 March 2010 exclusively for NTUC members.

"NTUC Club has been actively building communities for the Labour Movement through our entertainment and lifestyle facilities. With bowling being a constant source of national pride and passion because Singaporeans love the game and are reigning champions of various competitions, we have identified a genuine need for the establishment of U Bowling to cater to the individual love of the game at a community level," said NTUC Club Chief Executive Officer Yeo Khee Leng.

Orchid Bowl which is operated by Family Leisure Private Limited, the largest bowling operator with 140 lanes and a wholly owned subsidiary of NTUC Club, is also pleased to be part of the Labour Movement's LM2011 vision. Said Orchid Bowl General Manager Chew Teck Keng: "Orchid Bowl is delighted to be instrumental in helping NTUC build up and drive an exciting bowling community in support of LM2011's vision to be an all inclusive Labour Movement for All Collars, All Ages and All Nationalities."

To kick start its new community with a bang, U Bowling had its first 24-hour bowling challenge from 10am on 3 April to 10 am the next day. This challenge welcomed competitors from the public, unions, as well as NTUC members. Among the unions, the United Workers of Electronics and Electrical Industries scored the best and won the fourth prize. Young NTUC came in 17th position, followed by U Live in the 22nd position and nEbO in the 25th position.

Join U Bowling Today!

Registration for U Bowling membership is ongoing. For as low as $30 membership fees a year, existing NTUC members who join will receive an exclusive welcome pack worth $200 and enjoy attractive benefits which include:

- Additional $1 value for every $10 top-up in the stored value payment card to purchase bowling games
- Two NTUC LinkPoints with every $1 spent
- Exclusive rate of $12 per hour per lane for a family bowling package
- Two free bowling games as birthday treats
- Online tracking of bowling scores

Interested public can also be part of the U Bowling community at a special rate of $147 which is inclusive of a one-year NTUC membership. Please visit www.usports.sg for more details.

No Fuss About The Social Media Buzz

By **Billie Anne Lyou,**
Senior Specialist, U Family

Blogging, Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare… Wait, come again? What square? If you do not know what these terms mean, then start "googling" them now. Hang on, you do know that "googling" means to search for something on the Internet, right?

With Social Media infiltrating the lives of youths at lightning speed, it is no surprise that parents are trying their best to keep up with their children on the latest trends in the online world.

Before you dismiss Social Media as merely a tool for making friends and playing games, you will be heartened to know that it can be used for family bonding and generating your child's interest in school subjects.

To show parents how to harness Social Media in a useful way, U Family partnered the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, National Library Board, Tampines East Community Club to organise the "Parenting In The New Infocomm Age" seminar on 20 March 2010 for more than 150 parents.

Taking place at Tampines Regional Library, the event started with an entertaining segment by well-known husband and wife team, Nura J. Esman and Esman Supa'at, who shared how parents can use today's information communications in a fun and engaging manner for their preschoolers. Madam Nura also recommended websites such as sesamestreet.org that offers educational activities which make good 'fillers' for breaks.

Madam Nura also went on to expound Social Media tools such as Blogs and Facebook. She also shared how she hones Nyla, her 4-year old daughter's observational and writing abilities by browsing through photo albums of friends and relatives abroad, crafting simple well-wishes and penning her thoughts in short sentences. Mr Esman added a bit about how he would download child-friendly applications on his iphone and play games with Nyla during father-daughter bonding sessions.

So What Did The Parents Tweet?

"Some say parents know best but kids know more in the Infocomm age. I want to learn along with my child and bond at the same time." @albertyee

"My role is to engage my teenage kids to a new level of engagement and be their best of buddies." @NGunasekaran

"It's really an eye-opening experience for me to learn that there so many useful tools that are available for parents and kids." @LimSuatLian

Second speaker, Dr Bernard Leong, co-founder of SG Entrepreneurs, spoke on the rising popularity of mobile social networking tools beyond Facebook and Twitter. He also gave a brief introduction and demonstration of how programmes such as Foursquare, Qik, UStream and Gowalla work.

The later half of the seminar saw Claudia Lim, Founder of 24Seven Communications, detailing ways in which infocomm can be harnessed by parents of primary school children to make teaching and learning fun. She also recommended parenting portals such as kiasuparents.com and asianparent.com that contain parenting-related resources.

From final speaker, Effendy Ibrahim, Consumer Business Lead, Symantec Asia South, participants also learnt about the potential risks involved and precautionary measures that a parent can take to ensure good cyber well-being. From cyber-bullying to phishing, data loss to ID fraud, Mr Effendy added a touch of humor to an otherwise serious topic to enlighten parents that cyber risks should not be feared and can be minimised with proper measures.

The seminar concluded with a hands-on session where the friendly speakers taught parents how to kickstart their new media journey by helping them create their very own accounts in Facebook and Twitter.