

**SPEECH BY MR GAN KIM YONG,
MINISTER OF STATE (EDUCATION & MANPOWER),
AT THE SINGAPORE MARITIME OFFICERS' UNION (SMOU)
LUNAR NEW YEAR HONG BAO PRESENTATION LUNCHEON,
14 FEBRUARY 2008, 12.00PM**

Captain Robin Foo, President, Singapore Maritime Officers' Union

Mr Thomas Tay, General Secretary, Singapore Maritime Officers' Union and Vice-President, NTUC

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction

1 Good afternoon. I am delighted to join you today at SMOU's Lunar New Year Luncheon and Hong Bao Presentation. Let me first wish everyone, 恭喜发财, 万事如意!

2007 Performance and Positive Outlook Ahead

2 This is the 16th successive year that SMOU is hosting the Lunar New Year Luncheon to spread the joy of reunion and celebration. Indeed, there is much to cheer. Our economy grew by 7.7 per cent in 2007, and created an unprecedented 236,600 jobs. In particular, the Singapore maritime sector registered double-digit growth across the board in 2007¹. Singapore is now host to more than 5,000 maritime

¹ The Port of Singapore handled 27.9 million TEUs in 2007, an increase of 12.7 per cent over 2006. Total vessel calls grew by 11 per cent, reaching 1.46 billion gross tons. Bunker sales grew by 11.2 per cent and crossed the 30 million

establishments, which contributes about seven per cent to our GDP and employs some 100,000 workers. The *Review of Maritime Transport*, a report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), ranked Singapore as the 10th most important maritime country in 2007.

3 We have attracted major events that will further enhance the vibrancy of Singapore's maritime cluster. For example, the inaugural *Sea Asia* maritime conference-cum-exhibition launched in Apr 2007 attracted over 7,000 participants from 42 countries. Our economy is forecast to grow between 4 to 6 per cent, and prospects for the maritime cluster remain good.

Manpower Challenges in Maritime Cluster

4 With the current tight labour market, the maritime cluster will face increasing challenges in attracting and retaining the manpower necessary to sustain Singapore's position as a premier International Maritime Centre. The multitude of job opportunities in the labour market today means intense competition for workers across all sectors of the economy. The thriving maritime cluster has created many new and exciting job opportunities, such as ship brokers, charterers, naval architects and marine engineers. These are well-paying maritime jobs, with salaries as high as \$7,000 monthly for a

tonnes mark for the first time, hitting 31.5 million tonnes. The Singapore Registry of Ships grew by 13.8 per cent to reach 39.6 million gross tonnes as at end 2007.

ship charterer with 3 to 5 years of experience. But the reality is that jobseekers today have many options to choose from.

5 I am heartened to learn that SMOU has put in place a series of programmes to address this challenge. The newly established Wavelink² Maritime International Pte Ltd (WMI) was set up to add value to the maritime industry through the education and training of seafaring officers. I encourage seafarers to take advantage of WMI's educational programmes.

6 To further rejuvenate the industry, the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA), in collaboration with SMOU and the Singapore Organization of Seamen (SOS), has launched two scholarship schemes to attract young Singaporeans to the sector. These are the Tripartite Maritime Scholarship Scheme (TMSS) and the Seafaring Alternative... An Investment for Life (SAIL) Scholarship. Last year, 15 TMSS and 3 SAIL Scholarships were awarded to 'O' level holders interested to embark on a maritime career. These initiatives will augment the supply of seafaring officers.

7 SMOU has also been proactive in helping older workers stay employable through initiatives such as the Seniors Employment Guidance Programme. In collaboration with Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) and NTUC's Centre for Seniors, the

² Wavelink Co-operative Ltd (Wavelink) was jointly founded by SMOU and NTUC on 29 June 2000 to promote opportunities for social interaction and create career opportunities for members.

programme helps SMOU's older members to understand the ageing process and financial planning as well as explore further employment opportunities. SMOU has also set up the Seafarers Provident Fund to help members address the financial challenge of retirement. I am glad that SMOU is actively helping older workers to stay employed, and meet their retirement needs. You are a great example to inspire others to do more in this regard. To the 350 SMOU senior citizen members celebrating Lunar New Year here today, I applaud you for your positive attitude in keeping yourselves active and gainfully employed.

8 We are joined today by about 50 senior citizens from SMOU's adopted Charity - Henderson Senior Citizens Home. YOUNG SMOU³ has been taking an active role in community service, visiting and assisting the elderly residents at Henderson's Senior Citizen's Home. This is a meaningful and worthwhile effort. As our society progresses, we must not forget our seniors and those who are less privileged. This a much cherished Asian value and we must work hard to preserve it.

Conclusion

9 With the strong tripartite partnership, I am confident that Singapore's maritime cluster will continue to grow from strength to strength, thereby creating even more opportunities for Singaporeans, young and old alike.

³ SMOU's Youth network

10 I wish you all a very happy and prosperous Lunar New Year. 新年快乐. Thank you.