

# 28 lauded for promoting co-ops

**Former presidents and politicians among those recognised for serving the movement**

Melody Zaccheus

Former president S R Nathan and late president Devan Nair were honoured last night for their contributions to the Singapore cooperative movement.

They were among seven "champions" recognised by the Singapore National Cooperative Federation (SNCF) for promoting the cause.

The others included Marine Parade GRC MP and FairPrice chief executive Seah Kian Peng, and Singapore Labour Foundation deputy chairman Lim Boon Heng.

"Without their support, vision and leadership through the decades, the cooperative movement would not have thrived and achieved a reach as wide today," said the federation's chairman Chan Tee Seng.

Mr Nathan, for instance, made the case for a standardised rate of union subscriptions in 1969. And Mr Lim, who worked for 26 years at the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), championed quality and affordable care services for senior citizens.

This led to the establishment of NTUC Eldercare in 2000.

Ms Dolly Goh, SNCF's chief executive, said the Cooperative Champion Award winners had "bravely battled the odds" and fought against conventional ways of running trade unions and businesses.

"Between the seven of these champions, they clocked in more

than 200 years of selflessly serving the cooperative movement," she added.

Twenty-one other people and NTUC FairPrice Cooperative were also recognised for their contribution to the movement at last night's Honour Awards ceremony.

They included Mr Teo Yock Ngee, board director of AUPE Multi-purpose Cooperative Society. He said he felt honoured to receive the accolade.

"It's important that we continue

to shape and develop policies to cater to the needs of our members," he said.

Speaking at the ceremony, NTUC secretary-general Lim Swee Say said it was important for enterprises to stay competent and competitive, and to care for employees and consumers.

"To have the head of a businessman and the heart of a social worker is no mean feat," he said.

He added that he was glad such enterprises existed in the form of co-operatives and social enterprises.



AUPE Multi-purpose Cooperative Society board director Teo Yock Ngee was among those recognised for their contributions to the cooperative movement.

"Together as a network of co-operatives and in partnership with others, including business enterprises which are aligned in purpose, we can keep doing more to meet the ever-increasing needs of our communities."

Yesterday, the SNCF also launched a new grant framework to support budding social entrepreneurs who want to set up new co-operatives to help society.

It can also be used by existing co-operatives keen to develop their staff, improve their productivity, build capabilities and expand services.

The federation is working with educational institutions to introduce cooperative education into the curriculum through elective courses, campus talks and competitions.

Mr Chan said the aim is to promote a sense of social mindedness among young people.

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Senior Parliamentary Secretary Sim Ann and Little India Shopkeepers and Heritage Association's chairman Rajkumar Chandra watching participants of a Pongal cooking competition in Little India yesterday.

## Little India harvest festival draws 2,000

Some 2,000 people celebrated Pongal festival – the traditional South Indian celebration of good harvest – in Little India yesterday.

The last day of the four-day celebration included events such as a light-up ceremony and cultural shows.

Participants competed in a cooking contest, where they stoked fires to boil rice, mixed with milk, sugar and water. As Pongal tradition dictates, they let it boil over as a sign of prosperity.

The sweet delicacy is then eaten as a "blessing for better things to come", said engineer Damodaran Muthusamy, 43.

Ms Sim Ann, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Communications and Information, as well as Education, was guest of honour.

Yesterday's festival was organ-

ised by the Little India Shopkeepers and Heritage Association.

The yearly Pongal festival was originally held to celebrate a good harvest in South India, where farming is the main source of livelihood.

In Singapore, it marks the beginning of the 10th Tamil month, and families spend the four days spring-cleaning and visiting other families, where youngsters pay their respects to the elders.

Passers-by yesterday also had the chance to see a mini "cattle farm", where cows – adorned with coloured horns, tinkling bells and flower garlands – grazed in a small pen.

This is a festival practice to honour the cattle for ploughing the fields and providing milk.

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