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Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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**SPEECH BY DR JOHN CHEN, MINISTER OF STATE FOR
COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
AT THE INAUGURAL SBS COFFEE EVENING
FRIDAY, 25 FEBRUARY 2000, 6.00PM
JURONG EAST BUS INTERCHANGE**

Good evening ladies and gentlemen

National Archives of Singapore

I am very happy to be here to kick-off the inaugural SBS Coffee Evening. I couldn't help but smell the aroma of freshly brewed coffee when I stepped into the bus interchange. It is indeed very refreshing.

Equally refreshing, is the novel way in which SBS is proactively reaching out and fostering closer rapport with its customers over a cup of coffee.

The informal setting of the interchange and its readily accessible, central location make it a conducive environment for friendly dialogue. The Coffee Evening is a great opportunity for SBS to better understand its customers' needs and wants, as well as for customers to acquire a more intimate understanding of how a bus service is operated.

As Chairman of the Supervisory Panel of the Feedback Unit, I cannot emphasise more the importance of feedback. At the national level, the Feedback Unit helps the government to gain a better idea of how Singaporeans feel about public policies and how they can be further fine-tuned. Feedback from the public also provides an opportunity for the various government agencies to explain government policies, so that Singaporeans can have a better understanding of the rationale for these policies.

Singaporeans all over the island rely on SBS to ferry them to all points on the island - to work, home, school and to social engagements. Commuters expect a service level that is both reliable and of high quality. SBS as a service provider that comes into contact with large numbers of Singaporeans daily has the unenviable task of meeting the expectations of its customers. Two-way feedback is hence crucial, and even a necessity. Without accurate feedback from SBS, misperceptions could grow unchecked in customers' minds. Similarly, SBS without feedback from its customers could be inclined towards complacency.

I am heartened to note that SBS, having recognised this need, provides many avenues for feedback, like their Customer Service Hotline, internet e-mail and feedback forms. I also understand SBS has an in-house scheme where its own executives adopt a service and provide feedback on the service level. SBS also

has a “Friends of SBS Club” where its members provide feedback on its bus services.

The Coffee Evening is yet another such effort by SBS to garner public feedback, although it has a different scope. It is an occasion specially set aside for direct interaction between SBS’ management and its customers. The Coffee Evening opens a whole new dimension of customer relations based on face-to-face interaction. This kind of dedicated attention to customers is what elevating customer service to a higher level is all about. It is this kind of service innovation that will delight customers whose expectations are ever on the rise.

Commuters should perceive these Coffee Evenings not just as an occasion for providing feedback or suggestions but also as an opportunity to cultivate an appreciation of the operational environment of a bus operator. This would help them understand better the constraints faced by bus operators. Such understanding would make their trips more pleasant. It would also make them more supportive of bus operators’ efforts in improving their services.

Take for example, traffic jams. Buses and commuters alike are, if you will, at the “mercy” of traffic conditions on the roads. Morning and evening peak hours, accidents, fallen trees and even heavy rain can cause traffic jams and disrupt the bus arrival times. Even if the traffic jam is only in one direction, buses caught in that jam will take longer to reach the interchange and turn around. Hence even if the bus commuter is travelling in the opposite direction of the traffic jam – his bus may be delayed. Fostering better understanding of these situations will help to ease anxiety and unnecessary stress for both the commuters and the service providers. It will enable the bus operators to concentrate on service improvements.

It will also encourage commuters to adopt the good practice of allowing for unforeseen circumstances, like traffic jams, when planning a journey.

SBS is inviting bus commuters to an open dialogue through these Coffee Evenings so that together, you can further improve the bus services. So, do come forward with your feedback and suggestions, and get to know SBS better.

On that note, I now have the pleasure to officially inaugurate the first SBS Coffee Evening.

Thank you.

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