

SICCI's 87th Anniversary Dinner and SICCI-DBS SIEA Presentation Ceremony, 29 September 2011
Keynote Address by Mr Lim Hng Kiang, Minister for Trade and Industry, Singapore

- Mr R Narayanamohan, Chairman, Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce & Industry
 - Mr Kirpa Ram Sharma, Vice-Chairman, Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce & Industry; and Chairman, SICCI-DBS Singapore of Indian Entrepreneur Awards (SICCI-DBS SIEA) 2011 Committee
 - Mr Inderjit Singh, Member of Parliament for Ang Mo Kio GRC, and Chairman of the Panel of Judges for SICCI-DBS SIEA 2011
 - Excellencies
 - SICCI's Advisors, Directors and members
 - Ladies and gentlemen
1. I am delighted to be here with you this evening for the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce & Industry's 87th anniversary celebration as well as the presentation of the SICCI-DBS Singapore Indian Entrepreneur Awards 2011.
 2. SICCI has a long and distinguished history. Established in 1924, it has grown in size and stature to become a dynamic, forward-looking organisation with a network of partners who span the globe. Representing a significant membership base that cuts across a wide spectrum of businesses and industries, SICCI allows for the exchange of information, promotion of enterprise, development of commercial opportunities as well as the interaction of related constituents.
 3. While serving its members, SICCI is also an important partner of the Singapore government. It has regularly provided valuable feedback and inputs on government policies and informed the government of the views and concerns of its members on economic-related issues.
 4. While Singapore's economic outlook this year remains positive, with the economy on target to achieve a 4 to 6 percent annual growth, several global events continue to cast uncertainties on the world economy. As you know, just before we celebrated our 46th National Day, the world witnessed the worst global stock market sell-off since the height of the global financial crisis. This was triggered by the Standard & Poor downgrading of the United States debt for the first time in 70 years. Not everyone agrees on the significance of such downgrades.
 5. Nonetheless, in the near term, markets will likely remain jittery due to four major factors:
 - a) Fragile economic climate;
 - b) Sovereign debt crisis in Europe, which poses contagion risks due to significant cross-border lending and trade with the United States, Asia and Latin America;
 - c) Risk of rising inflation due to expansionary monetary and fiscal policies; and
 - d) Geo-political unrest in the Middle East and North Africa which could impact oil prices.
 6. Despite the challenging global environment, the Singapore economy has done well. Fortunately for us, economic growth in Asia remains strong. Developing Asia showed strong resilience through the 2009 global recession, underpinned by recovery and rapid expansion of the region's two emerging economic giants – China and India, which will remain the key drivers for regional and global growth.
 7. I understand that SICCI has been active in its efforts to help Singapore businesses penetrate the growing Asian market. Apart from the global economic powerhouses like China and India, it is reassuring to know that SICCI is looking at other emerging markets, particularly those in the region, which hold much business and investment prospects for SICCI's members and Singapore.
 8. We know the Asian economic story. There are no straight lines in the Asian growth, but by every indication, this is where the largest increment to global demand is going to come from – now, the

next decade and beyond. Cross-border activity too is on the upswing in Asia – intra-Asian trade is growing much faster than trade with the rest of the world, and intra-Asian investments are picking up quickly.

9. Growth itself, however, presents a unique set of challenges. Controlling inflationary pressure is a major challenge that governments in many Asian economies are grappling with. Labour shortages, capacity constraints, along with rising commodity and food prices are threatening to push inflation beyond acceptable levels. We are not immune to these cost pressures but we must continue to do what is necessary to remain nimble, competitive and relevant so that we can stay ahead of global competition. At the same time, we have to moderate inflation and minimise its impact on our businesses and people.
10. This means we need to constantly review our businesses operations, innovate and further improve our business models. We must steer our economy towards productivity-driven growth, step up our efforts in innovation, improve the skills of our workforce and reduce our reliance on low-skilled foreign labour for more sustainable and inclusive growth. To achieve that, all of us – the government, enterprises, business chambers, industry associations and workers – need to work together to move our industries up the economic value chain and press on with our efforts to upgrade the skills of our workforce. Only then can our companies remain competitive and profitable. Only then can we raise the standard of living for our people through better jobs and higher incomes.
11. The need to constantly innovate and improve is particularly important for small-medium enterprises (SMEs) as they play a critical role in our economy. Today, SMEs in Singapore employ seven out of every 10 workers, contribute 60 percent of national gross domestic product and generate about 49 percent of total value-add. Just how should SMEs ride on this growth momentum to grow their business and accelerate their pace of internationalisation? How can the workforce work smarter and more efficiently? How do local businesses deliver greater value-add to a global marketplace and strive to distinguish themselves? These are some vital areas we should be thinking about.
12. Productivity and innovation are vital to the survival and profitability of SMEs in sharpening their competitive advantage. We must recognise that productivity is a long term journey and we must never stop seeking better ways of doing things, re-examining our work processes for higher efficiency, creating a culture of innovation for higher value-added products and services as we continue to acquire new skills and disciplines. Hence, it is important that business chambers like SICCI and industry associations play a key role in this journey. With a broad mix of businesses and a combination of both strong local customer bases and a global reach, I believe SICCI is well-placed to take advantage of these trends and to lead in their development.
13. SICCI should also examine ways and means to reach out to the growing number of Indian companies in Singapore, currently numbering approximately 4,500. The phenomenal growth of Indian businesses in Singapore has created a strong and positive impact on the Singapore socio-economic landscape. In its effort to link Singapore businesses to Indian companies with operations here, I understand SICCI will publish the Directory of Indian Companies in Singapore, in partnership with the High Commission of India in Singapore, early next year. This endeavour will provide an important opportunity for international businesses to gain a deeper understanding of the huge potential offered by Indian companies in Singapore and the important role that Singapore can play in linking Indian companies to regional and international businesses and vice-versa.
14. The Chamber has made tremendous progress since its inception. Today, in a highly dynamic global market place, SICCI provides the necessary linkages and connections to its members so that they are able to grow their businesses locally and internationally. It provides the necessary training courses and programmes enabling its members to enhance their knowledge, expertise and competencies and build capabilities. It advocates the views of its members at appropriate platforms so that these views are taken into account during policy formation. These strategic foci and thrust have ensured that SICCI remains an important partner for Indian companies.

15. Let me now talk about the Awards being presented tonight.
16. The SICCI-DBS SIEA have become an important and prestigious business accolade for Indian entrepreneurs. The Awards serve to acknowledge outstanding local Indian entrepreneurs who demonstrate excellence and drive in their field of business, while making social contributions a significant part of their business philosophy.
17. I am sure that the recipients of the Awards have proven beyond doubt that they have the ability to successfully create, sustain and expand a business. They represent the very best of talent and success in the Indian business community in Singapore. While we can only have one entrepreneur of the year for each of the four categories – Large Enterprise; Medium Enterprise; Promising Entrepreneur and Family Business – we must agree that all the nominees are in fact leading entrepreneurs of the local Indian business community.
18. In addition to the SICCI-DBS SIEA, the Chamber will present the SICCI-DBS Singapore Indian Business Award. Into its fifth year, the Award recognises Singaporeans and Indians who actively promote bilateral relations between the two countries. As in the case with the Singapore and Indian governments, companies and individuals from both countries also have an important role to promote the increased cooperation between our two countries. The recipients of this Award are a personification of these efforts.
19. This evening, SICCI will also present, the SICCI-DBS India Enterprise Award. Inaugurated last year, this Award is presented to an Indian company registered in Singapore that has made significant contributions to and a positive impact on Singapore's socio-economic development. This is an important initiative. As mentioned earlier, there are approximately 4,500 Indian companies operating in Singapore and they actively support Singapore's growth and progress. The recognition through this new Award will further strengthen their connection with SICCI, the business community and Singapore.
20. I shall conclude by congratulating the recipients of the Awards for their achievements and success. They richly deserve the accolade.
21. I would also like to wish SICCI the very best on its 87th anniversary. Let me commend the SICCI leadership for its continuing efforts to grow and strengthen the chamber. SICCI has grown from its pioneering days in the 1920s as a merchant association to become one of Singapore's most respected and active business organisations today. I am confident that SICCI will continue to play its important role of serving its members and contributing to the further growth of the Singapore economy.
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