

# VIBRANCE



## Orange Ribbon Celebrations go

**The first national racial harmony celebrations will also celebrate migrant cultures, reports**

**This July**, people will be tucking into juicy Turkish *döner kebabs* to celebrate racial harmony.

The meal of slices of roast meat will be part of a spread of food from all over the world that will be laid out at a carnival to launch the inaugural National Orange Ribbon Celebrations on July 6.

This programme was conceptualized by the Central Singapore CDC in 2006 to celebrate ethnic and cultural diversity and harmony in the District. The Orange Ribbon Celebrations has now been elevated to a national-level project, spearheaded by the five Community Development Councils, Self-Help Groups and OnePeople.sg.

This year's national-level celebrations, which have been six months in the making, go beyond the four basic ethnic groups in Singapore. They also acknowledge the country's growing number of migrant cultures.

One way this is being done is through stalls selling dishes characteristic of various ethnic groups. Among the dishes on sale will be Thai mango salad and the Japanese pancake *okonomiyaki*. Local favourites available include the Eurasians' *sugee cake* and Indian *vadai*.

These items will be sold at stalls, which will also serve information about the origins of the items.

Guanyang Secondary School maths teacher Chew Tok Lee, who assisted in the planning of this inaugural event during her 10-week work attachment



The planning committee picked the riverside for the launch, for its history and scenerichers.

with Central Singapore CDC, explained: "These new migrant groups constitute a critical part of our cultural landscape. Showcasing their customs and traditions can also serve as an educational experience."

At the carnival which is to be held at the stretch of land beside Riverside Point near Boat Quay, visitors will be entertained by a series of cultural and fusion performances. These include

performances of Malay *dikir barat* and the Sikhs' *bhangra*.

Noted Mr Gilbert Fernandez, the co-chairman of the event: "Music is something that can be shared, regardless of ethnicity or religion."

The highlight of the launch will be a 2km mass walk in the Clarke Quay area. It will start and end at Merchant Loop. Along the way, the 4,000 or so participants expected will be



# national

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KONG YEN LIN

entertained by stilt walkers, jugglers, samba percussionists and more.

"Brisk walking is a healthy exercise that everyone can take part in, it's a good platform for interaction and promoting racial harmony," said Mr Fernandez.

All participants have been asked to dress in orange for the occasion. Decorations will also be in orange.

The 44-year-old, who is also the Deputy General Manager for Community Projects at Central Singapore CDC explained: "A visual representation of racial harmony is very important."

Determining a location for the launch was a challenge. The Padang was considered, as was Fort Canning Park, but the stretch of Singapore River, from Merchant Loop past Clarke Quay and Coleman Bridge back to Merchant Loop was chosen because of its historical value. In addition, it has become a cosmopolitan area in recent years, which is apt for the effort of integrating new citizens and expatriates into the local community.

The National Orange Ribbon Celebrations will be officially launched by Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports. He will be accompanied by the Districts' Mayors.

Besides the carnival, all the CDCs will have their own individual Racial Harmony-themed events, which include runs, telematches, film and arts festivals,

while OnePeople.sg is organising courses, workshops and conferences on ethnic and religious issues.

Each will have a signature event too. Central Singapore CDC's is its TRUST Home programme. Here, young people visit the home of a member from another ethnic group, to learn about the group's customs and traditions.

## The big launch

- 4,000 participants expected to take part in the Harmony Walk.
- 4,000 participants to wear the Orange Ribbon pins to symbolically launch the celebrations and pledge their commitment to racial harmony
- 2km street-parade style Harmony Walk filled with colour and vibrancy.
- 6 months of planning and execution went into the project.

Said Mayor Zainudin Nordin, advisor to the National Orange Ribbon Celebrations' organizing committee: "There are currently many racial harmony initiatives at the ground, but we need to raise it even higher and reach out to different sectors of the community."

One way is through the HarmonyWorks! Conference, which is OnePeople.sg's signature event. At this day-long meeting, which is the finale to the Orange Ribbon Celebrations, participants will discuss key issues concerning inter-racial ties.

It will be held at Republic Polytechnic in Woodlands and will be facilitated by the polytechnic's students.

"It'll not be all talk and boredom. There will also be fusion performances by students. It's being organised by youths, for youths," said Mr Ramesh Ganeson, the co-chairman of the National Orange Ribbon Celebrations.

"We're using a bottom-up approach here. We want to hear the voices of our young participants, and get them to explore, on an individual level, possible means that they can contribute to the bigger picture.

"Young people nowadays are growing up in rosy conditions, and we don't want them to take that for granted. They should be actively taking the initiative to manage and maintain inter-racial ties," added Mr Ganeson, who is also the director of OnePeople.sg.

Guest speaker Norman Vasu, from the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, will be presenting his findings from his latest research on local inter-ethnic ties. He expects to "learn more from the participants than they will from me".

He said of the conference: "It's a good platform where people can realise the supposed 'special-ness' of their ethnic culture is not very 'special' or different from other cultures.

"In fact, we do have more in common with one another than we normally think."