

NEW AND IMPROVED

3 food centres pledge to keep their old prices

■ BY NICHOLAS YONG

THREE markets-cum-food centres with decades of history will re-open this new year, following months of upgrading.

The makeovers to Block 726 West Coast Road, Block 216 Bedok North Street 1 and Block 505 Jurong West Street 52 have given these facilities new water pipes, wiring, toilets, tables and stools, among other improvements.

The West Coast and Bedok North centres re-open today, while the Jurong West one is expected to do so by the second week of this month.

Most stall tenants at the three centres have pledged to retain their old prices.

Anticipation has been building in their neighbourhoods.

The president of the West Coast hawkers' association Ng Yong Wah said: "People will be curious to see what it is like, as the stalls have been closed for so long. It has always been lively anyway, as the market is near the main road."

He noted that the food centre draws even customers from Tampines, on the hunt for stalls that have moved there. The fish-ball noodle stall is among those retaining a loyal following.

Over in the Bedok North centre, which is nearly 30 years old, Mr Goh Ah Kee, the hawkers' association president there, said most of the tenants are unlikely to raise prices.

He said: "I have asked them not to do so, since times are bad. You can still get nasi lemak and lor mee here for \$2."

Anyone tracking down the nasi lemak stall - which is currently operating in Chinatown and will open for business at the Bedok North centre after the Chinese New Year - need only look for the queues snaking from it in the morning till everything is sold out, said Mr Goh.

His hawkers' association counterpart in Jurong West, Mr Low Boon Peng, said the market's improved facilities will "definitely" pull in more customers.

The market is known in western Singapore as a destination for cheap food, he noted.

The National Environment Agency launched its 10-year, \$420 million Hawker Centres Upgrading Programme in February 2001 to give hawker centres a facelift. So far, 66 markets and food centres have been upgraded.

Separately, Sengkang residents can look forward to a new market and food centre opposite the Sengkang MRT/LRT station and bus interchange next year.

HDB is inviting tenders from private operators to build and run this stand-alone market and food



The market and food centre in Jurong West Street 52 is expected to open by the second week of this month. PHOTO: JOSEPH NAIR FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

Just in time for the new year

THE following markets-cum-food centres will re-open in the new year:

BLK 216, BEDOK NORTH STREET 1

- Built in 1979
- Has 196 stalls, including 82 selling cooked food
- Re-opens today

BLK 726, WEST COAST ROAD

- Built in 1980
- Has 195 stalls, 60 selling cooked food
- Re-opens today

BLK 505, JURONG WEST STREET 52

- Built in 1985
- Has 190 stalls, 60 selling cooked food
- Slated to re-open early this month

Sengkang's new market and food centre sited opposite the Sengkang MRT/LRT and bus interchange is, on the other hand, slated to open only next year.

It will have about 100 stalls, half of which will sell cooked food.

centre, which will house about 50 market stalls and 50 cooked-food stalls.

HDB said Sengkang was selected to try out a privately run mar-

ket and food centre since it is a new town, and many residents have asked for an additional market and food centre.

nicy@sph.com.sg