

To:  
cc: (bcc: NHB NASReg/NHB/SINGOV)  
Subject: Speech by DPM Lee, 11 June 2000

# *Singapore Government*

## ***MEDIA RELEASE***

Media Division, Ministry of Information and the Arts, 140 Hill Street #02-02 MITA Building Singapore 179369. Tel: 837 9666

---

SPRInter 4.0, Singapore's Press Releases on the Internet, is located at:  
<http://www.gov.sg/sprinter/>

---

**SPEECH BY DPM LEE HSIEN LOONG  
AT KEY HAND-OVER CEREMONY  
TO 800,000TH HOMEOWNER  
AT ANCHORVALE LINK, SENGKANG  
ON 11 JUNE 2000**

I am very happy to be here with you this morning. The families about to collect the keys to your new homes have waited for this day for a long time. For Singapore, today's event is also significant. HDB is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, and today, HDB will be issuing keys to its 800,000th home-owner. This is a significant milestone in our public housing programme.

The housing situation in Singapore has changed dramatically since Singapore gained self-governance in 1959. Home ownership was then a rare privilege. More than 500,000 people lived in sub-standard housing. The homes were cramped, dark and dirty. Without basic facilities like piped water, electricity and modern sanitation, life was harsh and difficult.

In 1960, the Government created the Housing and Development Board (HDB) to tackle the poor state of housing in Singapore. Mr Lim Kim San became the first Chairman. Barely a year later, in May 1961, a major fire broke out in a big squatter slum in Bukit Ho Swee. Overnight, 2,000 families became homeless. The new HDB had to build new flats quickly to re-house these families. Within 9 months, it had completed 768 Emergency 1-room rental flats. The rest of the affected families moved into their new flats soon after.

With the emergency eased, HDB went on to build bigger and more comprehensive towns.

In 1964, the Government introduced the Home Ownership for the People Scheme. We offered generous grants for public housing development and subsidised mortgage financing for HDB flat owners. In 1968, we allowed Singaporeans to use their CPF savings to pay for their HDB flats. This made home ownership even more affordable.

Our aim was to enable as many Singaporeans as possible to own their homes, especially the lower and middle income groups. This would give every Singaporean greater financial security, and most crucially a stake in the country. We were building a national service army, and the SAF would only fight if every national serviceman had something valuable of his own to defend.

Today, nearly four decades on, HDB living has become a way of life for a large majority of Singaporeans. We have reached almost universal home ownership. 86% of the population live in public housing. 9 out of 10 Singaporeans are home owners. This is an achievement beyond what we had imagined possible when we started the Home Ownership Scheme in 1964. No other country has come close. Around the region, Hong Kong's home ownership rate is 51%. In Tokyo, Japan, it is about 40%. In Australia, the state of Victoria has the highest home ownership rate of 44%.

The quality of public housing has been high. In terms of average living space per person, each Singaporean has 24 square metres of living space. This is more space per person than any other city in Asia, including Tokyo (15 sm), Seoul (13 sm) and Hong Kong (7 sm). It is not just the individual flats that are larger, but the overall comprehensive, integrated living environment in HDB new towns that is exceptional. Schools, markets, play-grounds, parks, neighbourhood police posts, and public transport, are all carefully planned as part of the estate. This is especially so with the newer towns that HDB has built in recent years, like Sengkang. In the older towns, like Toa Payoh and Ang Mo Kio, the upgrading programmes and estate renewal programmes have made a visible difference. They are much improved today, from what they were when they were first built.

In tandem with our economic development, the profile of HDB residents has also changed, across all flat types. HDB's household surveys show how rapid and profound this upgrading has been. HDB has just published the results

of its 1998 Sample Household Survey. Compared to the previous Survey 5 years earlier in 1993, the average monthly household income of HDB residents has risen by about 42%, from \$2,600 in 1993 to \$3,700 in 1998. In 1993 five out of ten households lived in 4-room or bigger flats. By 1998, six out of ten households lived in 4-room and bigger flats. Furthermore, HDB residents can now afford more of the luxuries of life: refrigerators, TV sets, telephones, and even personal computers and air-conditioners. These were unimaginable in Singapore 40 years ago, and today are still way beyond the reach of most people living in developing countries.

The HDB has played a pivotal role in this progress of our nation. Without the home ownership programme, without the new towns which have developed into harmonious, organic communities, Singapore would be a totally different society today. People would not feel that sense of pride and ownership, the population would be restless and disaffected, and nation building would have been much harder, if not impossible. We could not have built a cohesive, disciplined, and motivated society the way we have done.

For the future, the HDB has to keep pace with our changing society and meet the evolving needs and aspirations of Singaporeans. Over the years, HDB has built a wide variety of flat types and designs at different prices. It has also constantly improved HDB flat designs to make the flats and their surroundings attractive and congenial for Singaporeans to live in. Singaporeans from all walks of life, including middle and upper-middle income families, have made HDB flats their homes.

Your new home in Sengkang is a good example of HDB's efforts. In Chinese, Sengkang means 'prosperous harbour'. HDB has tried to capture the town's early past as a fishing port in its architectural interpretations. Sengkang is the first HDB town where the LRT System is built in tandem with the development of the town. When the LRT begins operation in late 2002, residents will enjoy a seamless pattern of travel that will serve as a model for other new towns.

Another first for Sengkang was the Sengkang Town Development Steering Committee. This was set up under the chairmanship of your MP, Dr Michael Lim, in October last year, to look into the provision and integration of various facilities in Sengkang – schools, shops, wet markets, covered linkways, recreational facilities as well as better transport services for all of you. This 55-member committee comprises grassroots leaders as well as representatives from

several government organisations. It is a good example of how the community is taking the lead to improve the quality of life for residents of Sengkang Town. As the newest members of Sengkang Town, you too can play a part, working with your neighbours to build a place you can truly be proud to call " home" . I am sure you will find it a fulfilling and exciting experience.

Once again, congratulations to all of you for becoming new home owners. I wish you all the best as you settle into Sengkang Town.

Thank you.

National Archives of Singapore