

SPEECH BY THE ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR LOCAL
GOVERNMENT, LANDS AND HOUSING, MR. TAN THENG
CHIANG, DURING THE DEBATE IN THE LEGISLATIVE
ASSEMBLY ON THURSDAY, APRIL 24, 1958.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the course of this debate, the Hon. Members for Queenstown and Serangoon and my colleague, the Hon. Member for Pasir Panjang, have spoken on those passages of the Governor's Speech concerned with public housing, the new Development and Housing Authority, land clearance and resettlement, and land use and control.

We have heard harsh criticisms because the Development and Housing Authority has not been established. Land use and control as envisaged in the Master Plan has been scorned and described as arbitrary.

The Singapore Improvement Trust has been accused of obstruction while the integrity of its staff has been disparaged in the most uncalled for manner.

The legislation in respect of the new Development and Housing Authority has admittedly taken a longish time, but that has not prevented housing going ahead more rapidly this year. The legislation is in its final draft stages and will come before this House at an early sitting - in about June. Earlier introduction of this legislation has been complicated by the fact that since the new Development and Housing Authority will not have planning functions, as in the case of the present Singapore Improvement Trust, it has also been necessary to provide for the establishment of a new Planning Authority to be charged with planning responsibilities. Two Bills, therefore, will shortly be introduced. Basically, however, it can be said that delay in introducing legislation or creating the new Authority has not in itself impeded progress in the provision of housing. Had a new Authority been created earlier, this would not have helped the situation which depended basically on the resettlement of families before more houses could be built.

The most unfortunate single factor impeding the rapid provision of housing so urgently needed for the low income groups of our population has been due to the fact that almost all the urban and suburban sites required for public development have been and are occupied by families who, if evicted, would suffer great hardship. As a consequence, public housing and other development has inevitably been slowed down - and in some cases has come to a stop. It was not until the Government established a Land and Resettlement Authority to overcome this problem by properly providing alternative accommodation, either by rehousing or resettlement, that any headway could be made in the provision of houses for the general public. The Resettlement Department up to date has:

Acquired 19 areas for resettlement and allocated farms -
altogether 3,870 acres have been so allotted.

Developed 16 areas of Crown land amounting to several
thousand acres.

Mapped and designed a further 12 areas amounting to
4,680 acres.

Settled 1,235 old families and 1,032 new families. A further
2,000 vacant lots are now ready for allocation.

In the last year, approximately \$1,800,000 was used to this end, while a further \$2 million is included in the Estimates for this year.

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As regards public housing, only 1,274 housing units and 70 shops were completed in 1957; whereas 4,815 housing units were completed in the two years 1955 and 1956. Now that the Resettlement Department is succeeding in resettling families, more rapid strides are being made with low cost housing and at the present moment the situation is much more satisfactory in that a further 4,971 housing units and 127 shops are under construction. A further building programme - Programme No.9 - providing for a further 3,500 ordinary dwellings, 95 cottages and 95 shops will shortly come before the House for financial approval.

As may be seen, therefore, despite difficulties, Government has succeeded with resettlement and public housing. In fixing rents, Government has also taken into account the needs of the low income groups in order to bring S.I.T. homes within the reach of ordinary working families. Accordingly, two-room flats either built or are now being built under Programme No.8 at Kallang, Albert Street, Rochore Road, Bukit Timah Road, New Bridge Road, South Bridge Road, and elsewhere are let at subsidised rents of only \$35 per month, although the economic rent for such a flat is more than twice that amount. As a further concession.---

When I say "two-room flats", it means a bed-room and a hall. As I was saying, Sir, as a further concession, rents of only \$30 per month are charged for such flats in respect of tenants rehoused as a result of slum clearance.

The special needs of Malays are also provided for. Malay settlements are being further developed and with the establishment of the Malay settlement at the 8 milestone West Coast Road in September last year, there are now two Malay settlements in Singapore. The first Malay settlement at Jalan Eunos is being extended by the addition of a further 164 acres to provide accommodation for 700 families. The immediate development of 34 acres to provide accommodation for 186 families has already begun. The lots have been surveyed and 40 lots have been pegged out. This means that allocation can proceed within a week or so. A third Malay settlement at Ayer Gemuruh is also under way. The present Kampong Ayer Gemuruh occupies an area of 21 acres. Plans for the extension of this area to give a total area of 95 acres to provide additional accommodation for 400 families are envisaged.

I should now like to reply to criticisms concerning land use and control. As already stated, planning legislation is shortly to be introduced. This legislation, coinciding with the approval of the Master Plan, is designed to implement the Master Plan. A Notice of Approval is about to be gazetted together with information concerning the exhibition of the approved Master Plan, with an explanation of all its provisions. The Master Plan represents the culmination of many years' careful study of all those aspects of life in Singapore which materially influence the use of lands and buildings, and provides a blue print for the future development of the whole island, taking into account in the light of our rapidly increasing population, our future expanding needs for homes, schools, public services and utilities, new urban and suburban centres, including new towns, improved road communications industrial expansion - all of which are designed to offer a better future for the people of Singapore.

There is nothing arbitrary about the Master Plan. Objectors to any of the provisions of the Master Plan were given the opportunity of having their objections heard at a special Court of Inquiry held in 1956. Hundreds of objections were heard and the Plan has been

amended in many ways. Hon. Members will have an opportunity shortly of expressing their views on the final provisions of the Master Plan when the planning legislation comes before this House.

Concerning the Singapore Improvement Trust, we have heard accusations of delays and obstruction. Regarding planning approval by the S.I.T., this organisation has also suffered from shortages of staff which in the past may have caused delays in the consideration of plans.

The situation today, however, is much happier than in the past. There is only one plan in the Singapore Improvement Trust which was received prior to the 1st of March, 1958. Every other application received before the 1st of March, 1958, has been dealt with. On an average, the S.I.T. receives about 150 plans each month for consideration. Plans are, in fact, now being dealt with expeditiously.

As regards the number of houses or buildings which can be constructed per acre, densities are laid down in the Master Plan and take into account the proper use of land and availability of services etc. over the next 20 years. Clearly proper control to prevent the reversion to slums, to safeguard against haphazard development and to ensure cohesion and use of available services is a fundamental necessity. The provisions of the Master Plan were made public in 1956 and objectors had an opportunity of stating their views, including questions of density.

The accusations of corruption in the S.I.T. are more serious. The Hon. Member who made these accusations also referred to two specific instances of which he described as futile delays or obstruction. His disappointment in matters in which he was personally concerned can be understood, but an attack on the integrity of the S.I.T. on such grounds is unwarranted.

It is not only unwarranted, but it is unfair and unethical. In one case a planned roundabout required a building to be set back - this was in the interest of better highways and traffic flow. In the other case, an ancient monument had first to be dispensed with owing to its dilapidated state of repair before new development could proceed.

As regards corruption, general accusations without substance are not good enough. The Ministry of Local Government has not received a single specific allegation from the Hon. Member concerned. It would be relevant to enquire if he has placed his special knowledge at the disposal of the Commission dealing with corruption or the Corrupt Practices Bureau. Until proof of any general or specific corruption has been established, his accusations stand refuted. Certainly disappointment or the disapproval of development projects which are not in the interest of Singapore does not constitute corruption.

APRIL 24, 1958.

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