

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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MAIN POINTS OF REMARKS BY MINISTER S JAYAKUMAR IN
RESPONSE TO MPs' QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS IN PARLIAMENT ON
6 JULY 1999 AT THE SECOND READING OF THE SULTAN HUSSAIN (AMENDMENT) BILL 1999

Clari fication of Legal Aspects

. In response to questions raised by Members, I let me reiterate that the legal position is very clear.

. As former Minister for National Development Mr Dhanabalan said in this House on 15 Apr 89:

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"In 1896 towards the end of the last century, there was a dispute among the family of Sultan Hussain as to who was the successor to the Sultanate and to the estate, i.e. the Kampong Glam Estate. This matter went to court and in Dec 1897, the Court of Appeal ruled that there was no one who could claim to be successor. The estate therefore reverted to the Crown. It became State Land and it was no longer subject to the treaties which previously affected it."

. Since then, that is for more than 100 years, the Kampong Glam Estate, including the former Istana, has been State Land.

. Furthermore, this legal position has been made very clear in the Sultan Hussain Ordinance, which was enacted in 1904. The Ordinance has several provisions which reiterate this:

"The said land...having reverted to the Crown, shall from after the first day of Jan 1905, be administered by the Collector of Land Revenue in the same manner as other Crown Lands" (section 2)

"If the said lands in Kampong Glam, which are hereby declared to have reverted to the Crown ..." (section 4)

Progress on Resettlement of Occupants

. The resettlement exercise is proceeding well. This process takes time because Land Office has to identify and ascertain who were the occupants and who are eligible for resettlement benefits. For example, a few staying there were foreign workers. Some were eligible for certain kinds of benefits; others for less benefits...I have been assured by Land Office officials, that those who qualify for HDB flats will be able to afford the initial downpayment.

. As of today, Land Office has processed the majority of cases and almost three-quarters, some 122 out of 170 individuals, have already accepted the resettlement package and have moved out or are in the process of moving out.

Costs/Expenses to Government

. The final cost will depend on how many opt for annual payment and how many opt for lump-sum.

. Taking into account the number of people who have opted for a lump sum payment, the new scheme may cost the Government close to \$6 million at today's value.

. The Government will also incur cost as regards the resettlement benefits but I am unable to state now exactly what the cost will be as the exercise is still in progress. But we expect it to be around \$1.5 million.

Malaysian Media's False and Mischievous Reports

. Let me now turn to the comments made by Members about reports in the Malaysian media including the recent TV3 programme which have contained false

allegations and distorted the facts. Let me recount some of these:

(a) It had been erroneously reported that the Istana building will be demolished (Utusan Malaysia of 13 May 99, front page report, headlined "The Last Malay 'fortification' of Singapore will be torn down").

This is untrue. We have made it clear that the building will be conserved and used for the Malay Heritage Centre.

(b) It had been erroneously reported that the beneficiaries would receive a total of only \$350,000 (New Straits Times dated 3 May 99 reported that the "(Kampong Glam) residents are to receive the total of S\$350,000 payable over the next 30 years").

The truth is they would get \$350,000 per annum over 30 years.

(c) Some reports also stated that the Government had "seized the land" or "suddenly seized the land and evicted the 300 residents" (TV3 programme, "Analisis", on 30 Jun 99.).

This is also untrue. The Government had on several occasions, as far back as 6 years ago, announced in Parliament its plan to develop the Istana at Kg Glam into a Malay Heritage Centre. In May 1993, ie 6 years ago, then Minister for Information and The Arts BG George Yeo had informed the House that Mr Ridzwan Dzafir was chairing a working group to look into this project.

So it is untrue to say this was "sudden". Also, no one has been suddenly evicted - normal resettlement procedures have been followed, giving everyone ample time to make arrangements.

Furthermore, as I have mentioned earlier, the Kampong Glam Estate has been State Land for more than 100 years. The question of the Government "seizing" the land therefore does not arise.

(d) Some media reports had distorted the facts about the resettlement scheme and gave the impression that they were being evicted without any resettlement benefit.

The truth is that the occupants have been offered attractive resettlement benefits which include alternative HDB housing, removal allowances, payments for structures

which are in the vicinity of the Istana Kg Glam and from which they are vacating, and also ex-gratia payments.

(e) Furthermore, most of these media reports had conveniently ignored or omitted the fact that the project was to establish the Malay Heritage Centre which would benefit not only the Malay community but also preserve Singapore's multi-cultural heritage. Several MPs emphasised the important point that this project not only benefits the Malay community but everyone and is a symbol of our shared heritage.

(f) TV3 programme. Members have already referred to the TV3 programme which is a good example of suppression of facts. TV3 interviewed Mr Ridzwan Dzafir, Chairman of the Malay Heritage Foundation. However, TV3 suppressed important points made by Mr Ridzwan.

For example, Mr Ridzwan had said "the Malay community greatly welcomes" the Malay Heritage Centre. This was not carried by TV3.

He also said, "Regarding the land of Istana Kampong Glam and the Bendahara House, they have become State Land for almost 100 years. So it is not a problem for the Government here..." This was also not carried.

TV3 had also mischievously portrayed the development of the Malay Heritage Centre as "an excuse to acquire the Malay sultanate land", deny Malay rights and "erase history of the Malays". How can the intention be to erase the history of the Malays when so much money and effort had been expended by the Government to preserve Malay heritage through the Malay Heritage Centre.

I share the views of the Members that such irresponsible and mischievous media reports amount to interference in our internal affairs.

These media reports had deliberately distorted and played up the facts of a sensitive internal issue, without regard to the possible damage to racial harmony and social stability in Singapore. They could easily have worked up our Malay ground, caused ill-feelings between the different communities, and soured race relations. Fortunately, the facts were well publicised and known to all Singaporeans, so that these slanted reports failed to provoke a response from Singaporeans, or to damage our racial harmony.

Recently, Malaysian media and others accused the Singapore Business Times of interfering in Malaysia's internal affairs by commenting on political developments there. Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's Press Secretary wrote to the BT to put on record the Government's disapproval of the BT editorial in question. As the Members who have spoken have pointed out, non-interference cannot be a one-sided matter. The Malaysian media should not practise double standards. They should heed their own advice, and refrain from interfering in Singapore's internal affairs.

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