

14 APR 1988

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

Information Division, Ministry of Communications & Information, 36th Storey, PSA Building, 480 Alexandra Road, Singapore 0511. Tel: 2799794/5

88 - 08 - 3

Release No.: 09/APR
14-1/88/04/08

SPEECH BY MR S DHANABALAN, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
AND MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT,
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF SIA/SIABC AT SMA HOUSE,
ORCHARD ROAD ON FRIDAY, 8 APRIL 1988 AT 10.00 AM

I am honoured to be invited to officiate at the opening of the new premises for the Singapore Institute of Architects Secretariat and the Singapore Institute of Architects Building Centre. This is an important milestone in the Institute's pursuit of professional excellence.

Your profession has an important role in society. Architecture is an avenue for society to express its values and aspirations. In every generation, buildings and their architecture form the landmarks of that period. They constitute part of our history and heritage.

As Singapore prepares to move into the 1990s and the next century, we should ask ourselves "What kind of city and society do we want to create for ourselves?" The government has articulated its Vision for 1990 and followed that up with an Agenda for Action. Professional bodies like the SIA have contributed to this process.

I am happy to note that in conjunction with the official opening today, you have also organised a Year 2000 City Design Competition Exhibition. It is a commendable effort. As individual architects and as a professional Institute, you have a critical role to play in transforming Singapore into a City of Excellence.

For more than a year now, NAFA has been organising monthly open air art fairs at Orchard Pedestrian Mall. This has received enthusiastic support from art students and young artists who welcome the opportunity to introduce their art to the public and tourists besides adding life and colour to our art and street scene. Despite the lukewarm response from established artists, the determination of NAFA to continue with this project is yet another manifestation of its contribution to the promotion of local art.

The Government has already set its target to develop Singapore into a cultured society by the turn of the century. To achieve this objective, we need more artists, musicians, dancers, dramatists and writers to create quality artistic works for the enjoyment of the public. In addition, we also need to educate our people to appreciate the arts. In this context, art education institutions have a very important role to play in training artists and conduct general art appreciation courses for the general public.

I note with considerable satisfaction NAFA's recent development in this direction. Besides introducing higher training in the fine arts, it has also branched into dance and music as well as conducting part-time courses in fine and applied arts, training courses for art teachers in schools and general art appreciation courses for the public. In its next phase of development, NAFA may want to concentrate its effort to further develop itself into an arts institution of excellence attracting the best students from the region. Appropriate schemes can be devised to attract both talented students and reputable art educators of high calibre. Affiliation can be sought with well-known arts institutions overseas to enhance the status of NAFA. Such links could include using a common syllabus, conducting joint examinations, exchange of academic staff and students: With the setting up of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts, NAFA may wish to take the opportunity to contribute its ideas on how to achieve a more culturally vibrant Singapore to the Council.

Third, what were the cost considerations? If more than one proposal is equally acceptable, on the basis of needs and on the principles of planning, then clearly the proposals have to compete for the land on the basis of opportunity cost. By opportunity cost I mean what the market will pay for either use.

I must emphasise, however, that being paid the market value of the land is not the only or the main criterion in determining use. If there was a shortage of sports and recreational facilities in Telok Blangah, we would have agreed at a very nominal rate to the vacant piece of land being developed into a country club or a sports complex. This is in fact the situation in all HDB estates where land is set aside for recreational purposes even though other uses would enable HDB to get more for the land.

We would also have turned down any proposal to build a pollutive factory in the area, even if we were paid the market price for the land because, from a planning point of view, we cannot allow a pollutive factory in a residential area. After having considered all the factors, the land was approved for residential development.

Let me illustrate our problems with land allocation with another example. For those who are nature and bird lovers, you would know that there is a mangrove site in the Sungei Buloh area, west of the Kranji Dam in which there are about 126 species of birds or about 42 per cent of all bird species recorded in Singapore.

The Singapore Branch of the Malayan Nature Society proposed that 318 hectares in the area be designated as a bird sanctuary. Although the area is within the proposed Lim Chu Kang Agrotechnology Park which had been earmarked for high-tech intensive prawn farming, we decided to set aside 85 hectares for a bird sanctuary. Our ornithologist feels that 85 hectares in the Sungei Buloh area would be sufficient to support the wetland birds.

Since we have decided to designate the area as a bird sanctuary, we will only allow the traditional, low intensity prawn farming to continue in the area as this will not affect the bird habitat.

By giving up the use of the area for intensive prawn farming we knew we would suffer an economic loss, but we decided to keep it as a bird sanctuary. We did this because we want to preserve an important part of our natural heritage.

My purpose in giving you these illustrations is to emphasise that land allocation must be rational, taking into account, needs, planning evaluations and costs. The correct reflection of costs must be the opportunity cost of the land.

Maintaining a rational approach to land allocation is a hard-headed but not necessarily a hard-hearted approach. As the Sungei Buloh example shows, we do recognise the need for nature reserves, recreational outlets and other intangible aspects of a higher quality of life.

Having a rational framework for land allocation ensures that good decisions are made. The challenge to the professionals to ensure optimum use of land is a challenge to their planning and design skills. For an area or a building to be well-planned and well-designed, it must not only look good in itself and in relation to its surroundings, it must also ensure effective and efficient use of space. As land become scarcer and development more compact, such demands on your professional skills to ensure optimum use of space will mount. With growing affluence, expectations are going to rise that you provide a more aesthetic environment.

Increasingly, Singaporeans will look towards architects and other professionals to articulate their desire for a more pleasant environment. This is why I decided that the draft master plan for the Civic and Cultural District be open to comments and contributions from the professionals and the public. It is an opportunity for Singaporeans to be involved in creating the Singapore they want.

The second challenge facing your profession that I would like to address today is the ability to raise the standard and widen the scope of your services. Architectural services have come a long way from the days when one person was able to do everything himself from design to drawing and supervision. The need to provide comprehensive and competitive services stems from two trends. First, as development projects become bigger, more complex and sophisticated, professional competence must come from the specialised inputs of many architects and other construction specialists working as a team. Second, as we shift to high value added service industries, the export of brain services would become more important to our economy.

Is the present structure of our professional practices able to cope with these changes?

Today, professionals are only allowed to practise as sole proprietors or partners. In fact of the 245 architectural firms in Singapore, 173 (or 71 per cent) are sole proprietors, and 38 consist of two-man partnerships. The largest architectural firm has 15 architects. There are many limitations in insisting that professionals practise as sole proprietors or partners. The most severe constraint is that it hampers the growth of the organisation. The expansion, contraction and cessation of a partnership, which require the unanimous consent of partners, is difficult. Every introduction and retirement of a partner is regarded as a cessation. Clients often

react adversely to such recommencements. The partnership is also not allowed to team up with other allied professionals. These encumbrances are undesirable today, where major projects require integrated inputs from engineers, architects and other building professionals.

The incorporation of professional practices is one solution. For many years, several countries, including the UK, USA and Hong Kong, have liberalised their rules to permit professionals to practise through incorporated firms.

Today, I am pleased to announce that the government will be amending the Architects Act and the Professional Engineers Act, to permit registered architects and engineers to team up with allied professionals and to form limited liability companies. This change will mark an important milestone for professional practices in the construction industry in two respects.

Firstly, professionals will be given the option to form incorporated firms. Secondly, allied professionals would be able to team up to provide integrated architectural, engineering and other building services. Firms could expand more easily. Continuity is ensured. Incorporation would also give you greater credibility with your overseas clients. Our consultants would be better placed to compete for international consultancy works which are usually dominated by the big boys. Through incorporation we have a chance to join the big league.

In making this change, the government will introduce safeguards to ensure that public interests are not sacrificed. The main concern to the public is that commercial considerations may override professionalism and ethics. The other concern is that an aggrieved party may only seek contractual redress from a company which is limited in its liabilities.

To safeguard the public's concern, the government will include various measures in the amendments to the two Acts I have mentioned. Some of the measures are the setting of a minimum level for the paid-up capital, stipulating that the controlling interest of the company must reside with the registered professionals and requiring them to take up professional indemnity insurance. In addition registered professionals will be required to personally sign and, therefore, be personally responsible for their work. Hence, an aggrieved party, in addition to suing the firm, can still have recourse to the responsible professionals in tort.

A word of caution. Incorporation is not for everybody. It is important for professionals to decide which is the more advantageous form to pursue. I hope the SIA, together with other will familiarise their members on the business of incorporation. Professionals should take this opportunity to upgrade and expand their operations.

On this note, I wish to commend the SIA on its tireless efforts in promoting the architectural profession. Let me once again congratulate you on the opening of this new premises and hope that it will be the focal point of many successful endeavours for your profession in the years ahead.

@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@