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SPEECH BY MR LEE YIOK SENG, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT), AT THE 25 YEARS OF NATION-BUILDING CELEBRATIONS CUM ROAD SHOW AT HSIN MIN COMMUNITY CENTRE ON FRIDAY, 19 OCTOBER 1984 AT 7.30 PM

It gives me pleasure to be here this evening. This very place, where we are now gathered this evening, was once a squattered area. It has been developed into a new town with modern homes, infrastructures and other social amenities such as schools, shopping centre and community centre. It serves to remind us of the need for resettlement work in Singapore and the concerted efforts of both the Government and the people to turn our country into a modern state.

The need for resettlement works in Singapore is dictated by our limited land resources, growing population and continuing economic development. Singapore has a land area of 618 sq metres to accommodate our current population of 2.44 million. It is therefore imperative that our limited land resources must be properly allotted to meet the various claims of land users. Economic growth achieved in the last two decades has further increased the demand for land by both the public and private sectors for housing, urban development, public transportation, recreation and industrialisation projects. Therefore, squattered lands and slums need to be cleared so that they can be made available for various redevelopment schemes. The development of new towns and industrial projects has brought about a need for more roads, expressways and other public services, such as health, educational and recreational facilities. The resettlement programme has to be geared to clear encumbered lands for public development.

The achievements of the resettlement effort are not realised overnight. It takes 25 years of hardwork, endeavour and proper planning. In 1959, when the PAP Government was voted into office, there were a quarter million people living in slum areas and another one-third million occupying shanty huts in over-congested squatter colonies. In the city area, many of the shophouses built in the early days before the war became dilapidated because of age and lack of maintenance. They were due for demolition and redevelopment. Because of the dual need to make lands available for both public and private development and to upgrade the standard of living for Singaporeans, a comprehensive resettlement programme was drawn up in the 1960's.

Since then, the impact of resettlement on Singaporeans has been far-reaching cutting across all categories of the population. Perhaps, some statistics will give you a better perception of the magnitude of resettlement work and achievements. In the first 10 years from 1960 to 1969, a total of 37,153 squatters of all categories were resettled and paid $29M in compensation. In the second 10 years, 1970 to 1979, the number of squatters resettled increased to 104,643 and compensation totalled $305.7M. In the last four years, 1980 to 1983, the pace of resettlement was further accelerated and compensation paid out to squatters was much higher than the preceding periods. During these four years, a total of 60,512 squatters was resettled and paid $505.4M compensation.

Resettlement has never been a pleasant or easy task. However our achievements in this field have been exemplary. Our achievements have been made possible because of the following factors:

a) The people have responded well to Government's resettlement programme. Over the years, they have learned to accept resettlement as a way of life in Singapore;

b) The obligation of the Government to rehouse all Singaporeans who are affected by resettlement actions has made the resettlement process less painful and enabled the resettled families to adjust to their new living environment; and

c) A sensible Resettlement Policy which regulates rehousing priority and prescribes reasonable squatter compensations has helped to implement the resettlement programme.

The first comprehensive Resettlement Policy was introduced in 1964. However, over the years, several revision exercises were carried out to upgrade the Policy to meet the changing circumstances and as a backup for the accelerated programme.

There are some salient features in the Resettlement Policy which are worthy of mention here:

i) It is the implied obligation of the Government to rehouse squatters who are Singapore Citizens and who are affected by resettlement action. In other words, they will not be rendered homeless as a result of land clearance. Incentive has been extended to displaced squatters under the 1971 Resettlement Policy to puchase HDB flats with reduced downpayment of $100 under the "Home Ownership Scheme". They are also given resettlement priority to purchase HDB flats;

ii) Squatter compensation has been reviewed from time to time so that displaced squatters can claim reasonable compensation from Government. A revision in 1975 increased squatter compensation by 50 per cent. Another revision in 1979 rationalised the various rates of compensation

for farmers and residential squatters. Further revisions were implemented in March '81 and December '81.

The last two upward revisions in 1981 were necessitated by rising construction costs and inflation.

Cash compensation was first introduced under the 1974 Policy as an option for non-residential squatters, i.e. shops, factories, offices, associations, etc. The quantum was fixed at $15,000 per unit of non-residential rent-controlled properties in Central Area. However, this was increased to $30,000 in the 1975 revision and further revised to $58,500 in 1981. For those who prefer alternative accommodation in Housing Board shopping centres, priority is given in allocation of shop units with rental concession.

Special industrial centres are constructed for specific industries e.g. motor-repair centres have been developed in many new towns for relocation of motor workshops affected by resettlement action. Terrace workshops have been a standard feature in most new towns since 1970 to provide for relocation of small industries.

By the end of 1984, after completion of the current accelerated resettlement programme, there will remain a smaller population of squatters in Singapore scattered in small groups in the outlying areas. The total number is estimated to be between 35,000 to 38,000. These squatters will be resettled within the next few years. It is the Government's intention to make Singapore a squatter-free country by 1990.

If past performance is anything to go by, we do not anticipate major difficulties in our future clearance programme. The aspiration of Singaporeans living in slums and squattered areas for better standard of housing, has

made resettlement an accepted fact of life. The relentless efforts of the Government to find ways and means to accommodate specific needs in order to minimise disruption and dislocation have been well received. With this practical approach and the continued positive response from those who are affected by resettlement, we have every confidence to believe that the remaining programme will be completed on schedule.

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