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OPENING ADDRESS BY MR PETER SUNG, MINISTER OF STATE (FOREIGN AFFAIRS) AND (NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT), AT THE 11TH BI-ANNUAL SEMINAR OF THE BUILDING & ESTATE MANAGEMENT SOCIETY AT THE WESTIN PLAZA ON 2 AUGUST 1989 AT 9.00 AM

Introduction

Your society is concerned with building and estate management. I will therefore concentrate on buildings for residential, commercial and industrial uses.

Construction in the last 20 years

In the early seventies, there was a shortage of buildings in Singapore. Shortages were found in housing, offices, factories, schools, hospitals etc. Partly for this reason and partly because of the steady economic growth in the last twenty years, the construction industry has experienced healthy growth except for some minor hiccups.

By now, we have a good stock of buildings. 87 per cent of our population is staying in HDB estates. We also have a modern city and a green and clean environment.

Challenges in the 1990s

The needs for the construction industry in the next decade is quality, not quantity. There is a need to continue to renew the older parts of the city. There is a need to upgrade the quality of both residential and commercial buildings throughout the country. There is also a need to improve productivity and introduce improved techniques of construction.

I shall now try to visualise how these challenges apply to various factors of the construction industry.

Public Housing

With 87 per cent of the people now housed in HDB flats, there would be a slower programme for new construction. Greater emphasis will be placed on upgrading. The objective is to match or even exceed the standards now found in HDB flats in Pasir Ris New Town or Sin Ming Court. There will be efforts to

- add additional bathrooms or bedrooms
- extend the living space
- refurbish the interiors
- improve corridors and common areas.
- generally improve the ambience of the neighbourhood.

Public sector housing is likely to spearhead the introduction of better construction management techniques. We expect to see the introduction of new methods which use modular units, standardized components and "off-site" prefabrication. "Wet" trades and traditional craft skills will gradually be replaced by "fixing" skills.

These developments are necessitated in part by the need to upgrade productivity, in part because of the shortage of labour and of skilled craftsmen and in part because there must be minimum "disturbance time" in renovation projects as the residents will not be moving out of their flats during renovation.

Town Councils

Another development which will have impact on the building and estate management industry is the advent of

town councils. Town Councils are already being formed and by 1991 they will take over the estate management functions from HDB.

Town Councils are expected to encourage the building of precincts or kampongs. Each of these will have a different identity and provide a complete environment for living, recreation and sports, and parks and gardens. Each of these precincts will approximate private condominiums of today.

The conversion from present day HDB estates to condominium style developments will be a multi-billion dollar exercise. This offers new opportunities for the construction industry. It will provide a unique opportunity for a quantum leap in construction techniques, construction productivity and construction quality. It will also provide opportunities and challenges to architects and designers to create condominiums with distinctive architecture out of existing HDB estates.

Private Housing

So far, we have been talking about public housing. What about private housing?

We anticipate greater demand for private housing as a result of greater affluence, higher income levels and better education. Singaporeans will be more discerning. They will be looking not just for a roof over their heads. They want better quality, better finishes and more personalised designs.

A challenge for our architects and planners is "how to meet these requirements with given constraints".

- a) Land is limited and this must be made up by better layout and architectural designs.

- b) There is a shortage of labour and of skilled craftsmen. There is therefore a need for modular construction methods, imaginative architecture and interior decoration.

Commercial Buildings

There is already a good stock of offices, shops, hotels and other commercial buildings. Some of these need upgrading including retrofitting and refurbishment of interiors. Upgrading will also be called for to meet new standards of comfort and convenience, new developments in information technology and telecommunication systems and new advances in technology for "smart buildings".

These changes bring new challenges to the professionals.

- a) They have to keep up with the latest standards in these matters.
- b) They have to develop new methods for "fast track" renovations.
- c) They have to develop project management skills that result in minimum disturbance to the occupants when the works are in progress.

The URA has recently been reconstituted. This is not done for nothing. We can expect a quantum leap in urban renewal and town planning. Plans will be laid and their implementation will depend on market demand which is related to economic growth. In good time, Singapore will be turned into what Minister Dhanabalan refers to as a "tropical city of excellence".

There will also be some decentralisation. This should alleviate some of the congestion in the central business district. Town centres in housing estates may include more types of activities in future. This may widen the scope of activities for architects, designers and estate managers.

Other Structures

The construction industry also includes two other types of structures. The first is "institutional buildings" such as schools, hospitals, theatres and sports complexes. Although these structures have a different generic name, they are part of the community and the same analysis apply to them from the point of view of estate and building management.

The second type of structure is "physical infrastructural". This includes roads and rails, drains and canals, power plants, treatment plants, airports and ports. These structures are outside the scope of this seminar. However, some of these items will have a significant impact on the building and construction industry. For example when the expressway system and MRT are completed, it will change the pattern of transportation and therefore of economic activity in Singapore.

Conclusion

I have briefly described the trends relating to the building industry in Singapore. I hope you will be able to discern new opportunities from these trends. I also hope you will be able to develop fresh strategies to capitalise on these new opportunities in the course of this seminar. On this note it is my pleasure to declare open the 11th Bi-annual seminar of the Building & Estate Management Society.