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SPEECH BY MR TEH CHEANG WAN, MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE SIXTH CONFERENCE ON "OUR WORLD IN
THE CONCRETE AND STRUCTURES" AT THE ISLAND BALLROOM, SHANGRI-LA HOTEL
ON WEDNESDAY, 26 AUGUST '81 AT 9.30 AM

It gives me great pleasure to be here this morning, addressing your Association's Conference on "Our World in Concrete and Structures".

Today I would like to touch on quarrying operations in Singapore and to throw a little light on Government policy regarding such activities.

It is a well-known fact that the quarrying for building materials, so essential for the construction industry, can leave behind its path, widespread devastation and destruction if there is no proper planning and control. And for Singapore there has been no exception. Anyone flying over Tampines area can see for himself the colossal ruin caused by unrestrained sand quarrying in the past. Not only is the land pock-marked by excavations, Tampines is also now faced with the attendant problems created by irresponsible quarrying.

Because there were so many small quarries in the area, washing of sand was done haphazardly. Most of the regulations governing the proper quarrying of sand went unobserved. Quarry operators took the convenient and cheap path of dumping their slurry into drains. The rampant deposition of silt in turn sealed up canals, blocked the drainage system and caused widespread flooding and destruction of nearby farms during the rainy season.

When Government took over Tampines for the development of Tampines New Town, it also took over the responsibility of correcting the damage done.

The quarry operators who left Tampines, also left a massive accumulation of silt behind. Now Government is faced with the task of both getting rid of the silt and bearing the prohibitive cost of such a messy operation. The HDB engineers and earthwork contractor for Tampines New Town are now studying ways and means of transporting the silt for dumping at sea. And this is going to cost tens of millions of dollars - at public expense.

Much time and money has already been spent on cleaning up canals heavily laden with silt. For instance, the desilting of Bedok Canal alone will cost a total of \$5.4 million.

And even if all silt can be successfully removed from Tampines, some of the damage caused will be irreparable. For instance some sand pits have been dug so deep that to pile such a site would be even more expensive and more complex than piling on reclaimed land.

Therefore, the old system of cheap mining for sand must go. It is false economics for us to condone such operations whereby cheap sand is obtained at high public cost. We have therefore gradually been phasing out most of the small sand quarries.

The Government is now establishing a huge sand quarry in Tampines on a 113-hectare site. Because of the economies of scale, mechanisation of quarry operations has been possible. With proper engineering and planning, land devastation can be avoided. In order to discharge slurry into the sea, a 7,500 metre pipeline will be constructed. The total cost of setting up this mechanised sand quarry is estimated at \$50 million.

Similarly, with granite quarrying, Government has to adopt the policy of gradually phasing out all small, inefficient quarries. As Singapore has limited land, Government has to ensure that minimal land is utilised for such quarrying. Again, to achieve greater output of granite, only big quarries with management expertise, machinery and proper pollution control, can be allowed to continue.

To meet the demand for granite, both the HDB and the Government owned Resources Development Corporation (RDC) have recently installed three large quarry plants - two in Mandai and one in Pulau Ubin at a total cost of \$50 million.

With large-scale production of both sand and granite by Government bodies, we are confident that the building industry's requirements of both these basic materials can be adequately satisfied and prices can be stabilised within reasonable limits.

Recently too, the RDC has set up a ready-mixed concrete plant at Marina Centre. Some of your members have expressed their concern that competition from the RDC plant will severely affect their business and even threaten their very survival. I wish to assure all of you that any such fear is unfounded.

The RDC plant has a monthly capacity of 35,000 cu m. This is about 18 per cent of the total Singapore production of ready-mixed concrete. Government has no intention of further increasing the capacity of the RDC plant.

The primary consideration for the establishment of the RDC ready-mixed concrete plant at Marina Centre was traffic within the central area. With the development of Raffles City, Raffles Place and Marina Centre, large quantities of ready-mixed concrete would be required for all these mammoth projects. Vehicular traffic in the area is already very heavy and traffic congestion very prone. It is therefore highly undesirable for us to aggravate the situation with lorries plying in and out of the central area transporting concrete to the various worksites.

The establishment of the RDC plant in Marina Centre also serves as an invaluable demonstration that a ready-mixed plant need not necessarily be pollutive.

In the last decade several ready-mixed concrete plants have had to be re-sited because of dust pollution. It is our belief that with proper care and machinery, this mixing operation need not be pollutive at all. I think the RDC plant which is currently producing at 17,000 cu m per month, has now successfully proven this beyond the shadow of a doubt.

In the last ten years Singapore has achieved an unprecedented rate of physical development through the joint efforts of both the public and private sectors. In the next ten years, judging from the number of building plans approved, the building industry can expect to be even busier. I am looking forward to having the continued co-operation of all those involved in the building industry. May I wish you all here today, a very successful and stimulating conference meeting. #####