

23 JAN 1992

From: INFORMATION5 (8812:GVT224)
Subject: [Bishan Swimming Complex Opening]
Delivered: Tue 21-January-92 13:10 SING (20 lines)

91 - WKS - 13

Release No.: 56/NOV
09-1/91/11/30

**SPEECH BY MR WONG KAN SENG, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
AT THE OPENING OF BISHAN SWIMMING COMPLEX
ON SATURDAY, 30 NOVEMBER 1991 AT 2.30 PM**

I am very happy to be here this afternoon at the opening of the Bishan Swimming Complex, which is situated in Bishan East division of Thomson GRC. It is a double pleasure for me in the sense that firstly, this swimming complex is in my constituency and I am opening it so soon after becoming its MP. Secondly, swimming is a sport that I like.

Foreign visitors who come to Singapore often marvel at our development. For those who come here for the first time, they are surprised by what they see. For those who are regular visitors, they are still surprised by the pace of change. But for Singaporeans, we have more or less taken it for granted because we are living in it. As the Chinese saying goes "

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In the area of housing, for example, 87 per cent of Singaporeans now lived in HDB flats. Nine out of ten HDB families own the flats they live in. In other words, including those who live in private properties, almost 90 per cent of the people own their own homes. Tell this to any foreigners and they will be extremely impressed because they know that very few countries in the world have achieved this. Singaporeans can therefore be proud of their achievements. As we continue to make progress, our expectations also continue to rise. But we have to take a realistic view too because not every expectation of ours can be fulfilled.

Just look at the quality and design of the HDB flats. People are now going for bigger and better designed flats. Bishan for example, has some 18,000 flats housing 80,000 residents. Sin Ming Court, Bishan East and Bishan North - all in Thomson GRC - are examples of estates with their distinct precinct design and identity that help to promote community ties. With new HDB estates looking better, the older HDB estates will also need to be upgraded and spruced up. The Government has embarked on this upgrading programme so that residents in older HDB estates can also enjoy a better living environment. But building more and better flats are not the answer to promoting community spirit. The people who live in these estates need to play their role in fostering this community spirit. They need to take on more responsibility for themselves in making their estate a thriving place.

HDB has provided a wide range of social, recreational and commercial facilities within each housing estate so that people can function in a total living environment. It will try to provide as many facilities as possible within each housing estate, be they schools, sport complexes, shops, bus terminus and so on. But it would be too much to expect every HDB town to be so self-contained as to include every conceivable need of the residents. Sometimes, residents may encounter some inconvenience because a particular facility is not available. This is to be expected because in our land scarce Singapore, we cannot have all the facilities in every town. One neighbourhood, for example, may find that there are no shops and residents have to travel to another neighbourhood. They will find this to be inconvenient. But unfortunately, we cannot have shops everywhere because when there are too many shops, they will not be viable. Another example: residents may have to travel to the next town to borrow books from the library because MITA cannot build a library in every HDB town. Residents have to learn to put up with some inconvenience and not blame the MP or the Government for not providing some facilities.

A few words on the Bishan Serangoon Town Council. Since taking over the management of the estate from the HDB, the Bishan Serangoon Town Council has started a number of projects. Over the next few months, residents will see that their block number signs will be illuminated, some open areas will be beautifully landscaped, senior citizens' corners will be improved, some linkways will be covered and there will be modern children's playgrounds. Again, I must caution that when the town council plans for these projects, it cannot implement them all at the same time in every division. It will need time to carry them out and therefore some parts of Thomson GRC and Braddell Heights may see some facilities earlier than others. Residents will have to be patient and bear with it.

My first impression of Bishan is that it is a much improved town compared to the older HDB estates. The residents here are indeed lucky. The opening of this Bishan complex today marks another milestone in the development of Bishan. It now gives me great pleasure to declare open this swimming complex.

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