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# PRESS RELEASE

Information Division, Ministry of Culture, City Hall, Singapore 0617 • tel: 3378191 ext. 352, 353, 354 / 3362207 / 3362271

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STATEMENT BY MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, MR TEH CHEANG WAN  
 AT A TOUR OF SIMS DRIVE MARKET IN CONJUNCTION WITH  
 THE "SPEAK MANDARIN CAMPAIGN" ON 11 OCTOBER '81

PROGRESS OF HDB'S PUBLIC HOUSING PROGRAMME

At the beginning of this year, HDB contractors were unwilling to come forward to undertake public housing building contracts. Although tenders were called for the construction of 20,000 units of housing in the first five months of the year, only 1,931 units were awarded up to the end of May.

There were several reasons why the contractors were not willing to come forth. Many had lost money in their earlier contracts. Uncertainties were then prevailing in the building industry. Prices of building materials had escalated and this was compounded by the high cost of construction labour due to a critical shortage of workers.

The HDB building programme thus almost came to a stop. In May, I asked the HDB to hold a series of meetings with the contractors. By direct negotiations at these meetings, we finally managed to persuade our regular contractors to once again undertake public housing projects. These direct negotiations have so far proved to be very fruitful. In the last four months, we have managed to award 20,751 units of public housing. We are hopeful that by the end of the year, we will be able to give out a total of 30,000 units, so that by next year the HDB building programme can return to normal.

However, I must caution HDB applicants that our ability now to get building contractors does not mean we can guarantee them immediate delivery of a flat. The average construction time for a block of high-rise flats is between 2½ to 3 years. The HDB has already been set back by last year's all-time low number of only 15,053 units awarded. At the same time, the number of

HDB applicants ..... /2.

HDB applicants has risen astronomically. In the last 2½ years alone (from 1.4.79 to 30.9.81), the HDB registered 128,007 new applicants. As a result, the HDB waiting list today is still a staggering 110,804 (98,666 waiting to buy and 12,138 waiting to rent HDB flats).

The HDB will try its best to explore all avenues of speeding up construction. However, the introduction of pre-fab housing for instance and invitations to overseas contractors to undertake our public housing jobs, all too require a certain number of years' lead time. Their results can at best be seen in the long term and not in the immediate future. HDB applicants must accept the fact that they have to face an average waiting period of about 3½ to 4 years.

In our weekly Meet-the-People Sessions, Members of Parliament, including myself, are constantly beseiged by applicants asking for special consideration to jump the queue. I must once again reiterate that such requests cannot be considered. Everyone of the 110,804 applicants on the HDB waiting list are Singapore citizens. Each and everyone is also represented by an MP in the constituency where they now live. If recommendations by MPs can guarantee early allocation of flats, then all that the 110,804 applicants need do is to take one evening off to see their MPs. It is unrealistic for anyone to expect the HDB to miraculously produce 110,804 dwelling units overnight.

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