

**SPEECH BY MINISTER FOR MANPOWER DR TAN SEE
LENG AT THE REDAS MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL 2021 AT
ORCHARD HOTEL, 20 SEP 2021, 12.30PM**

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. Good afternoon. It is my pleasure to join you at the REDAS Mid-Autumn Festival 2021.

Addressing the challenges of COVID-19 in the Construction and Built Environment sector together

2. It has been close to two years since COVID-19 hit our shores and brought about irreversible changes to our lives - the way we live, work and play.
 - a. Across the economy, it has also created undeniable impact, with one of the most affected sectors being the Construction and Built Environment sector.
 - b. Throughout this period, the sector has pitched in strongly to support the Government in managing the impact of COVID-19.
 - c. I would like to take time to appreciate and thank all contractors and developers for your strong support, patience and partnership in keeping the sector and our workers safe.
3. The Government has been working closely with the sector to provide support during these unprecedented circumstances.
 - a. For instance, we provided significant financial support through the Jobs Support Scheme and Foreign Worker Levy rebates and waivers. This included waiving Foreign Worker Levies from January 2021 to September 2021 for employers whose workers were required to serve Stay-Home Notice (SHN) upon entering Singapore to reduce the risks of importation of COVID-19.

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- b. We understand your difficulties. To continue helping employers bring in workers safely and give them more time to adjust and manage the costs of SHN requirements, **MOM will be extending the period of the SHN levy waiver, from end-September 2021, to end-December 2021.**
 - c. In addition, the Ministry of National Development (MND) and Building and Construction Authority (BCA) introduced a \$1.36 billion Construction Support Package to help share the costs of implementing safe management measures and non-manpower related prolongation costs for public sector projects.
 - d. Beyond financial support, MND and BCA also introduced the COVID-19 (Temporary Measures) Act to support affected firms.
 4. The Construction sector also faced serious manpower challenges due to the border and travel restrictions.
 - a. We heard your struggles and have implemented exceptional flexibilities to relieve the manpower shortages and help businesses preserve core competencies.
 - b. For example, we extended the validity of In-Principle Approvals (IPAs) for all work pass holders who are unable to enter Singapore.
 - c. We also allowed a one-time renewal for Work Permit holders in the Construction sector that did not meet the renewal criteria, and waived the minimum period of employment requirement for Man-Year Entitlement-waiver.
 5. COVID-19 has also shown us that there are areas we can further improve on to take care of our migrant workers during their stay in Singapore. We have taken significant steps to do so including:
 - Setting up onboarding centres to bring in workers in a safe and calibrated manner;
 - Introducing a new primary healthcare system for migrant workers to enhance their access to healthcare; and
 - Supporting their mental wellbeing through Project DAWN, a taskforce set up to develop and implement a comprehensive support ecosystem to manage the mental health of migrant workers.

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6. In addition, we recently announced improved standards for new dormitories to enhance liveability and to strengthen the resilience of our dormitories against future pandemics.
 - a. Keeping our workers safe and taking care of their well-being takes a whole-of-society effort. We can all play a part by looking out for them.

7. That said, even as the situation starts to look better, we cannot afford to let our guard down. Many countries are still battling successive and new waves of infections, particularly with the more infectious Delta variant.
 - a. The sector will need to accelerate transformation efforts to stay ahead of the game.

Transforming the Construction sector to emerge stronger

8. The pandemic has highlighted the need to build a resilient sector.
 - a. In particular, the manpower challenges and disruptions faced by Construction firms have highlighted the risks of overdependence on migrant workers.
 - b. To emerge stronger, the sector should redouble efforts in two key areas: (i) **first**, to increase productivity through digitalisation and automation, and (ii) **second**, to strengthen our Singaporean core in the workforce.

Levelling up through technology

9. I encourage companies to tap on technologies to digitalise and automate processes, and to develop a leaner and more productive workforce.
 - a. In the real estate sector, robots were deployed for cleaning and sanitation work, while drones were used to conduct building inspections.
 - b. Some real estate agents even used 3D imaging to conduct online viewings of properties.
 - c. Through these strategies and more, businesses can aim to gradually reduce reliance on low-cost manpower.

10. The Construction sector will similarly need to keep pushing the adoption of technologies to enhance productivity.

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- a. Two key technologies that are critical in moving the sector forward are Design for Manufacturing Assembly, or DfMA, which would allow for prefabrication off-site, and Integrated Digital Delivery, or IDD, technologies.
- b. The Government has been working with the sector to defray the costs of adopting these technologies through the Construction Productivity and Capability Fund, and the Productivity Innovation Project scheme.

11. One project that has made good use of DfMA is Avenue South Residence.

- a. Avenue South Residence is a 1,074-unit residential development comprising of two 56-storey towers that was constructed using Pre-fabricated Pre-finished Volumetric Construction (PPVC).
- b. When completed, it will be the world's tallest concrete PPVC building.
- c. The developer UOL and builder contractor United Tec developed a design that had a high level of repetition and modularisation, which helped save time in both the design and construction phases.
- d. They also used IDD for off-site production and on-site installation, which facilitated coordination of factory and site schedules, and allowed for "Just in Time" delivery of construction modules to the project site.
- e. Overall, the adoption of PPVC resulted in improved productivity for the Avenue South Residence development.

12. More importantly, PPVC is less susceptible to labour disruptions compared to conventional projects which deploy workers on-site for casting and finishing works.

- a. It can also increase productivity by up to 40% compared to conventional projects.
- b. I strongly encourage companies to adopt such technologies to level up your operations.

Strengthening the local workforce

13. The pandemic has also reminded us that we will need to build a resilient workforce with a strong Singaporean core, to shoulder the responsibilities of nation-building and weather the storms ahead.

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14. Jobs in the construction sector have often been associated with the “three Ds” – “dirty, dangerous and demanding”.
- a. However, the sector is evolving and with this evolution comes many new career pathways that did not exist previously.
 - b. I hope you can transform the 3Ds into “Differentiated, Diversified and Distinguishing”.
 - c. For instance, supervisory production roles, Quality Assurance/ Quality Control roles and operation management roles are new job roles in the domain of construction management for production that help support a firm’s adoption of DfMA.
 - d. Beyond these roles, there are also emerging trends in collaborative contracting and green building and sustainability, amongst others, that will create more good job opportunities.
15. I hope that you can work with the Government to attract locals into the sector by investing in our local workforce.
- a. The Government has been working with Institutes of Higher Learning and the industry to build a strong talent pipeline through scholarship and sponsorship programmes.
 - b. Firms can co-sponsor suitable candidates through MND’s iBuildSG Scholarship and Sponsorship Programme to train and retain high performing employees in the firm.
16. One employee is Teh Ming Xuan, who was a recipient of the 2020 BCA-Kimly iBuildSG Undergraduate Scholarship.
- a. During his 8-month internship with Kimly, he rotated between 3 different departments to learn and assist co-workers and supervisors in various projects, from tendering, architectural drawings to scheduling an ongoing PPVC project.
 - b. As a scholarship recipient, Ming Xuan joined Kimly as a Planning Engineer after graduating from the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) with a Bachelor of Civil Engineering.
 - c. Today, apart from being involved in DfMA at Kimly’s PPVC factory, Ming Xuan is also part of Kimly’s own Innovation Hub, where he and his team

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research on advanced robotics and automation to develop new ideas for the company.

17. Apart from investing in fresh graduates, I want to urge companies to consider hiring and investing in mid-career Singaporeans.

- a. We should move away from a “plug-and-play” mentality, where we only recruit those who with relevant experience.
- b. Instead, I hope that everyone can adopt a more flexible “plug-train-and-play” mindset, hiring those who may not have the experience, but have the aptitude, willingness to learn, networks and experiential wisdom, by investing in their development.
- c. There are many such Singaporeans who are eager to take up roles in the Built Environment sector – we have very healthy application rates for our Career Conversion Programmes in the sector, such as those for Building Information Modelling (BIM) Professionals, DfMA Professionals, and others.
- d. These programmes help mid-career Singaporeans acquire in-demand skills to enter the sector. These mid-career workers bring with them an eagerness to learn and a wealth of previous work experience, and are valuable additions to any workplace.

18. Companies can also tap on the skills development programmes offered by the Government to build a strong pipeline of locals for the sector.

- a. For instance, we have the SkillsFuture Mid-Career Enhanced Subsidy which provides subsidies of up to 90% of course fees for over 8,000 SSG-supported courses and at least 90% of programme cost for Ministry of Education-subsidised courses.

19. At the same time, I urge fellow Singaporeans to actively reskill and upskill so that they can access the good career opportunities offered by the sector.

- a. The Skills Framework for Built Environment provides a good reference for the progression pathways in the sector by listing the skills requirements as well as training programmes to help workers prepare for their desired job roles.

Conclusion

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20. As we emerge from the pandemic, the Construction and Real Estate sector will continue to play a key role in building up Singapore for the future.

- a. Let us continue to work together to transform the sector – our people and our technologies – to become more productive and more resilient, and bring Singapore to greater heights.
- b. I wish all of you and your families a happy Mid-Autumn Festival. Thank you.