

Pioneers Lauded Ahead Of HDB's 55th Birthday

The Housing and Development Board turns 55 on Feb 1, and National Development Minister Khaw Boon Wan took the opportunity to thank pioneers at the agency for their contributions.

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Singapore: The Housing and Development Board (HDB), which turns 55 on Feb 1, was named one of the top 10 events that meant most to Singaporeans, according to a recent survey by the Institute of Policy Studies, and National Development Minister Khaw Boon Wan said he was "glad" the agency's role has "resonated strongly".

In a blogpost on Saturday, Mr Khaw said the early years were "exceptionally challenging" for HDB and its first chairman, Mr Lim Kim San, helped break new ground and laid a strong foundation which successive generations of HDB staff were able to build upon.

Among that pioneer generation of HDB staff is Mr James Bong, who is now 89. He joined HDB as a Resettlement Officer, and faced "strong resistance" from squatters then.

"In those years, squatters were common in Singapore, and living conditions were squalid. The most immediate and important task then was to resettle and rehouse the squatters in better HDB homes," he wrote. "While resettlement from slums to modern HDB now seems obviously positive, convincing the people then to move into high-rise flats was an arduous task."

"Officers like Mr Bong faced strong resistance from the squatters as it meant changes to where they lived, how they lived and where they worked. Tremendous patience and a human touch were needed," he added.

Mr Khaw said the impact of these pioneers' contributions will long be remembered, as they laid the solid foundation from which the ministry can move public housing to "even greater heights". Plans for upcoming Bidadari and Tampines North, for example, show the transformation of HDB towns in the past 55 years - "a transformation I am sure our HDB pioneers will feel proud of", he said.

"I think we have not disappointed them and I hope to continue to build upon their vision, to achieve greater success. Thank you HDB pioneers and happy birthday, HDB!" the minister said.