

## **Netizens dismayed that ex-chief planner thinks 10m population ‘not really a ridiculous number’**

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Singapore — When the country’s former Master Planner and CEO of the Urban Redevelopment Authority Liu Thai Ker said on Tuesday that a 10 million population in Singapore is “not really a ridiculous number” because of the country’s need to remain competitive many netizens were utterly dismayed.

And they said so in no uncertain terms, making it plain that the number is no less provocative than when he first uttered it in April 2013.

At that forum nearly nine years ago now, which was organised by the Singapore Institute of Planners on the topic of planning for 2030, Dr Liu had suggested Singapore look even further ahead, possibly to 2100 when it might have 10 million people.

“The world doesn’t end in 2030 and population growth doesn’t end at 6.9 million,” he had said then. That 6.9 million figure mentioned in a government White Paper on Population was already enough to prompt a protest against opening the doors even wider to immigration.

Dr Liu, 83, who was Singapore’s Master Planner from 1989 to 1992 when he left the public service, underlined on Tuesday that he was once again speaking in his personal capacity.

**He repeated that 10 million figure at the annual conference organised by the Institute of Policy Studies when asked if Singapore was getting too overcrowded, The Straits Times reports.**

The theme of the IPS’ 2022 conference is “City”.

Dr Liu is the founder and chairman of Morrow Architects and Planners. But to many Singaporeans, he is still indelibly associated with the Housing and Development Board where he worked for 10 years, rising to CEO and chief planner before leaving in 1989 for the URA.

Clearly, there has to be a disconnect between the thinking of a master planner whose horizons must reach far ahead of how ordinary folk view their country.

At the conference on Tuesday, Dr Liu said “We must be prepared for possibly faster economic growth to stand tall among” China, India, and Indonesia.

“And to do so, we must accept population growth. And partly because of that, a few years ago, I said, ‘Let’s plan for 10 million people’.”

The furore after the first mention of the 10 million figure in The Straits Times simmered down only to be re-energised in 2019 when it resurfaced in the course of a public dialogue with the then-Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat.

Then, during the 2020 General Elections, Singapore Democratic Party chief Chee Soon Juan made full use of that number, falsely claiming that the then Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat had said in an interview that Singapore should plan for this population size.

DR LIU , WHO HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN THE PLANNING OF SOME 50 CITIES, REITERATED HIS POINT THAT PREPARATION FOR A LARGER POPULATION IS KEY, “IF YOU DON’T MAKE PREPARATIONS NOW, WHEN YOU NEED MORE EXPRESSWAYS AND MRT LINES, WHERE WILL THE LAND COME FROM?”

In comments on The Straits Times Facebook page, netizens took issue anew with the prospect of 10,000,000 people living in Singapore.