

# 2 hot news

## Construction crunch takes toll on housing developments

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that while he only picks projects that he is sure his firm can complete, he has seen some developers cut corners to prevent losses and slipshod work is common.

A contractor who declined to be named said he had no choice but to push workers to work long hours, sometimes more than 60 hours per week. They also do not have days off unless they request for them. "If you have more people, the workload can be spread," he said. His firm makes sure workers are paid for their time and those who worked through the night would get rest the next day.

The impact seems to be felt more keenly in projects by private developers. Over the past two years, at least five projects — executive condominium project The Canopy, Design, Build and Sell Scheme project The Peak, The Coast at Sentosa Cove, The Sail @ Marina Bay and La Dolce Vita — have made headlines after residents complained about shoddy workmanship.

### SCHEDULE, QUALITY OF BTO FLATS UNAFFECTED: HDB

In contrast, the quality of public hous-

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**Mr Donald Ng**  
HEAD OF SALES  
AND MARKETING OF  
A DEVELOPER HERE

ing projects has improved, based on the Construction Quality Assessment System (CONQUAS).

Responding to TODAY's queries, a Housing and Development Board (HDB) spokesperson said the average CONQUAS score for HDB flats rose from 79.9 in 2007 to 88.5 last year. This is above the current national average CONQUAS score of 87.5, she said. The HDB attributed the higher quality partly to the use of the pre-fabrication method. The spokesperson noted that precast structural components produced in the factory environment typically offered much better quality compared with on-site construction. Property analysts noted that the prefab method also reduces manpower requirements, but at the expense of design.

The HDB also has a robust framework of quality assurance and checks, such as civil and structural audits and building inspection teams, the HDB spokesperson said. She added: "The quality of HDB flats has not been compromised despite the ramping-up of our building programme in the past few years."

Still, the deadlines for 36 HDB projects were extended for a variety

of reasons, including changes in design beyond the control of contractors or exceptionally inclement weather. Of these, 14 were completed in 2012 and the remaining last year.

Minister of State (National Development) Desmond Lee said yesterday in Parliament that of the 36 projects, liquidated damages were levied on six contractors for delays in seven projects because of poor project planning, coordination and execution, for instance.

The HDB spokesperson said that notwithstanding the extensions, all Build-to-Order projects in the past two years were completed within the estimated completion dates. She added: "The HDB faces the same challenges as other developers. But we will continue to do our best to deliver the flats according to schedule."

### NEW CONDOS BEAR THE BRUNT?

An owner of a Pasir Ris Grove condo unit, who wished to be known only as Victor, said he was dissatisfied that the parquet flooring had hollow spots and scratches when he received the keys to his unit two years ago.

Another condo owner, Mr Teo, 44, an IT manager, said he was frustrated

with slow progress on problems such as slanted sliding doors and chipped floors in his unit at The Canopy.

Mr James Tan, 30, who stays at The Peak, said he found minor defects such as holes between floor tiles when he moved in. Within a year or so, the windowsill stopper no longer worked and would leak water when it rained, while the boards of his cupboard started to bend and show cracks, he said.

Mr J A Goh, assistant division director of property firm ERA Realty Network, said he had seen an increase in more serious complaints in the past two years.

Mr Colin Tan, director of research and consultancy at Suntec Real Estate Consultants, noted that foreign developers tended to bring their own standards of quality and supervision, which may differ from those here.

Mr Chua Hock Tong, chief executive of construction and property company UE E&C, said there had been a record-high level of construction activity in the past few years. Yet, at the same time, the industry has been fraught with various challenges, he noted.

Mr Donald Ng, head of sales and marketing at a developer here, said his firm had processes in place, such as ensuring it does not accept handover from main contractors until defects spotted during checks have been rectified.

Noting that buyers' expectations and demands have also increased, Mr Ng said: "If (we) had more time, (we) would spend (it) doing and laying those tiles. But not (having) enough workers means (we) don't have enough time ... and we have to meet the standards and the demands of (the buyers), which is tough."

## Housing an important part of CPF system: Chuan-Jin

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While acknowledging that this is a fair consideration, Mr Tan pointed out that with higher returns come higher risks. "If you have funds and there is a

downturn in the market, at that point of withdrawal, would it affect your returns?" he asked.

He noted that the current CPF interest rates were far higher than rates from similar products in the market, but assured that this was an area the Government is looking at in enhancing CPF Life.

Mr Tan also said there was good reason for not allowing full flexibility in the use of CPF monies. The CPF is aimed at allowing peace of mind by providing a constant stream of income in retirement.

"If you allow monies to be extracted early, prematurely, there will be concerns," he said.

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