



TREVOR TAN

'Migrant worker' knocked to the ground

A concrete statue of a migrant construction worker — part of the just-opened Singapore Art Show 2007 (SAS 2007) — was broken on Friday when a delivery van reversed into it.

Foreign Talent, by artists Joshua Yang and Justin Loke of Verticle Submarine, was knocked down less than a week after it was erected.

It had been placed opposite the landmark statue of Sir Stamford Raffles near The Arts House as a commentary on the "common ground" migrant workers and Raffles shared as foreigners who contributed to the island's development.

One of the artists, Mr Loke, told TODAY that he was "speechless" about the incident.

In a statement released on Friday evening, the National Arts Council (NAC), organisers of SAS 2007, said that Vertical Submarine would begin making repairs on Saturday.

The NAC said that it "finds the incident unfortunate but is thankful that no one was hurt".

It also said that the driver had agreed to pay for the damages, and that "the NAC has extended assistance to the artists. It hopes that the work will be quickly reinstated for the enjoyment of the public". — MAYO MARTIN

Aids stats point way to HIV tests

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transmission occurring, and that was because the mother refused her HIV test until very late in her pregnancy.

Less than 1 per cent of pregnant mothers had opted out of the scheme.

While HIV testing "makes a lot of sense", Mr Khaw admitted that a lot of planning would have to be put into the exercise, such as bumping up counselling services for those found to be HIV positive.

Mr Andrew Tan, a 27-year-old engineer who is single, said: "I am okay with it as I don't think I'm at risk, but I think it may be uneasy for you if you know that you have engaged in risky behaviour (like unprotected sex)."

The chairman for the Government Parliamentary Committee on Health, Madam Halimah Jacob, described the opt-out HIV testing as an idea worth exploring.

"If you test by selection saying that people are in higher risk groups then one can say that you're passing judgment on lifestyle, choices, *et cetera*," she said.

"But if it applies to everyone subject to their right to opt out... then I think it's all right."

Mr Tan Thuan Seng, director of Focus on the Family, which had suggested mandatory HIV testing, said the MOH's move is in line with what it is proposing.

"I think once people get used to the idea that HIV testing will be routinely conducted, they will get used to it and eventually most will not opt out," said Mr Tan.

The things HDB residents want

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HEARTLANDERS' wish to have more say in their housing precincts and living environment may soon be granted.

For instance, likely changes to the Main Upgrading Programme (MUP) could give residents more flexibility in picking what upgrading features they want or do not want.

Under the MUP standard package, upgrading features within the flat include waterproofing of bathroom floors and installing grab bars. Now, those who vote for the scheme need to pay between \$2,490 and \$6,225, depending on the type of flats they own.

But in future, residents could choose between specific items instead of specific packages, Dr Maliki Osman, the Parliament Secretary at the Ministry of National Development, told TODAY.

The Housing and Development Board (HDB) said it was studying existing upgrading programmes and will announce more details when ready.

The suggestion came about following a major consultation exercise involving some 1,000 Singaporeans. The Forum on HDB Heartware was launched last November to source for ideas and views to strengthen ties in the heartland communities.

Many participants had indicated their desire for a greater voice and, said Minister of State for National Development Grace Fu: "What we have done is to look for policies that would allow flexibility and greater decision-making to be introduced." She heads a 12-member panel driving the forum.

Also, HDB residents affected by the Selective En-bloc Redevelopment Scheme will be consulted on the type of precinct facilities they want at their replacement site.

And Canberra division, in Sembawang GRC, will pilot a programme to get residents more involved in decision-making, such as through town hall meetings and block parties. At the latter, they can cast their ballots to choose a colour scheme for a block repainting exercise or decide where to install security CCTVs, for example.

But giving residents flexibility must be moderated by other considerations, said Ms Fu. "(Having) choices doesn't mean more expensive installation of facilities.

REQUESTS ANSWERED

Some initiatives based on proposals from the HDB Heartware Forum:

- Privately built and operated wet market/hawker centre at Sengkang Town Centre
- Selective En-bloc Redevelopment Scheme (Sers) residents to be consulted on precinct facilities at their replacement site
- Six households affected by Sers can opt to stay together at replacement site
- CCTV cameras to be installed at 12 blocks at Sembawang GRC
- Residents can buy a second season parking ticket at half-price
- Ten items added to list of Community Improvement Projects Committee-funded upgrading programme

We have to ... make sure it is still affordable to all the residents. We also have to consider the impact on decision-making because we do not want too many steps to be introduced and therefore hold back decisions."

Already, two suggestions thrown up by forum participants are seeing results.

With residents indicating that they "want something 'special' about where they live", the HDB and the National Heritage Board will launch a pilot programme to preserve the heritage and history of public housing towns.

And with heartlanders calling for more wet markets, the HDB — which stopped building markets in new towns after 2004 — has picked Sengkang as the site of a new wet market. But instead of working with the National Environment Agency to let units out to stallholders, the HDB will this time tender out a vacant site to a private operator to build and operate the facility on a short-term lease.

Said Ms Fu: "We are hoping to bring back the old-style hawker centre where it's naturally ventilated and you do not need to air-condition the place, therefore lowering the overall cost of operations."

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KEEPING FAMILIES CLOSE TOGETHER

It could be easier for married couples to live closer to their parents and in-laws, especially in popular mature estates, if the HDB takes up a suggestion by the Forum on Heartware.

The HDB said it would review its priority schemes but noted that "setting aside more new flats for some groups" would come at the expense of others.

Currently, a couple that is buying a flat near their parents' home can enjoy two to four times the balloting success rate — depending on whether they are first-time applicants — as compared to others. The

hope is to enhance their chances even further.

Another scheme to bolster the family unit involves allowing HDB residents to buy a second season parking ticket at half-price, so that they can park their vehicles more cheaply when visiting family members in a different estate.

Also, more families and neighbours affected by Selective En-bloc Redevelopment Scheme who want stay together can do so. Up to six households — instead of four currently — can choose to stay close to one another at the replacement site.