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Islandwide upgrading in the works

$600m lifts scheme aimed at 'lifts on every floor' ideal

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$332M GOODIES: (From left) Tampines GRC MPs Yatiman Yusof, Mah Bow Tan and Ong Kian Min chatting with residents at Tampines North Community Club yesterday.

DISHING out yet another piece of good news that is inevitably seen as an election sweetener, National Development Minister Mah Bow Tan yesterday said the pace of HDB upgrading has been stepped up islandwide.

A total of 64 precincts have been selected for various upgrading programmes, a 40-percent increase compared to the number of wards selected the last round. They include a $600-million lift upgrading scheme.

And there were other goodies announced yesterday.

Twelve town councils — overseeing another 100 blocks over and above the HDB lift upgrading scheme — will also fork out some $14 million to upgrade their lifts after having gotten the approval.

These town councils do not include the opposition ones of Potong Pasir and Hougang. They have not applied to use their town councils' sinking funds for lift upgrading.

Mr Mah's announcement came even as he unveiled a $332-million five-year upgrading master plan for his constituency of Tampines.

In a separate event at the neighbouring East Coast group representation constituency (GRC) at about the same time yesterday, his People's Action Party colleagues, led by Deputy Prime Minister S Jayakumar, also gave out details of a $500-million makeover to be carried out over the next five years.

Just last month, Aljunied GRC had announced similar plans, albeit at a lower price tag of $160 million.

With the good news being dished out one after another, Mr Mah yesterday gamely took on the inevitable question: Do these carrots spell an impending general elections?

This latest announcement, he said, is simply part of the Government's commitment to fulfil its promise to its citizens.

"The main point is that the upgrading programme is a major platform, a promise of the Government. We have made this promise at every election. The important thing is that we fulfil this commitment," he said.

So accelerated lift upgrading is really aimed at meeting the Government's promise to bring every-floor lift access to 3,800 HDB blocks over the next 10 years, he said.

Speaking to reporters in Tampines, Mr Mah nevertheless said he hoped for a contest in the coming elections.

"We always look forward to some form of contest here ... Whenever the election is called, it is a contest of ideas, of plans and programmes, and we let the residents choose. The ultimate winner will be the residents."

Over at East Coast GRC, Prof Jayakumar shrugged off suggestions that the slew of major upgrading plans are ground sweeteners.

"We are now entering another phase where the whole East Coast area will be as attractive and vibrant as the newly-built estates," he said.

"When the next five-year plan expires, there will be another five-year plan ... it's for the benefit of the residents," he added.

TAMPINES GRC

After about $227 million was spent on the neighbourhood since 2000, another $332 million will go to upgrade the facilities and amenities in Tampines GRC over the next five years. The bulk of the money — $200 million — will be used to provide lifts that stop at every floor for another 200 blocks by 2010. Of these, 14 soon-to-be-named blocks have been deemed eligible for lift upgrading. The rest of the $332 million will go towards various projects, such as an open space the size of one-and-a-half football fields beside the Tampines MRT station for activities and talks. Other plans include the remodelling of 35 senior citizens' corners, and 62 new covered linkways.

EAST COAST GRC

Under the East Coast Town Council's comprehensive $500-million makeover plan over the next five years, there is something for everyone. All remaining blocks will be eligible for main upgrading, including the lifts. Private estates in Feng Shan and Joo Chiat, and their hawker centres and commercial centres will be upgraded as well. Large-scale improvement will also be seen in the building of more leisure facilities such as park connectors and elderly- and disabled-friendly amenities. Upgraded lifts will have closed-circuit TVs. In addition, a pilot project will install 20 mobile surveillance systems costing $5,000 each in public areas with a high incidence of crime, such as car parks and lifts. One proposed location slated for March next year is the car park next to Block 98 in Bedok North Avenue 4, which is a vandals' target.