

Cinema, cricket field at biggest dormitory



Photo: ST

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 The Straits Times

When a new mega-dormitory at Tuas South Avenue 1 opens its doors at the end of this month, it will not just be Singapore's biggest, but also the first integrated facility of its kind.

The 16,800-bed complex will not just have a minimart, beer garden and foodcourt, but will offer recreational options, including a 250-seat cinema and a cricket field, within its 8.4ha compound.

Tuas View Dormitory will have 20 four-storey blocks, half of which have been built.

The biggest dorm currently operating in Singapore is a 12,000-bed facility in Kranji.

The new dorm will open in phases, starting with around 3,000 workers.

Active System Engineering, which runs the mega-dorm, said it is confident that it will be filled by the time it is fully operational at the end of the year, adding that the response from employers has been good so far.

This is one of nine dorms which will be built over the next two years around the island, according to tender documents obtained by The Sunday Times. They include a 25,000-bed dorm which will open in Sungei Tengah by 2016, and will add around 100,000 beds to the existing 200,000.

It is part of efforts by an inter-ministerial committee on foreign worker issues, which is headed by Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam, to speed up the building of more dorms.

Employers said the additions will help alleviate the shortage of dorms here.

There are an estimated 385,000 foreign work permit holders in lower-skilled jobs in sectors such as construction and marine. These figures do not include maids.

Most live in purpose-built and factory-converted dorms as well as quarters on construction sites.

The remaining 385,000 foreign workers are Malaysians who commute here daily, and those in the manufacturing and service sectors who are allowed to rent Housing Board flats and live in private estates.

Mr Kelvin Teo, president of the Dormitory Association of Singapore, hopes employers will be urged to move workers from quarters in construction sites and factory-converted dorms into the purpose-built dorms.

"When you stay at construction sites, there will always be sand and dust. Hygiene is also an issue," he said.

Dr Ho Nyok Yong, president of the Singapore Contractors Association, said the increase in supply of dorms will help to stabilise monthly rents which employers foot.

"Rents at dorms have increased in recent years from about \$200 to \$300 because of a shortage. We must keep housing affordable for employers who are already facing other cost pressures."

Mr Bernard Menon, executive director of foreign workers' group Migrant Workers' Centre, said that while building more dorms is a good move, raising standards at other types of housing such as factory-converted dorms and worksite quarters must not be neglected.

The group is working with the dorm association to roll out guidelines for all types of housing for foreign workers by next year.

However, Ms Debbie Fordyce, executive committee member of workers' rights group Transient Workers Count Too, is sceptical that errant employers will be motivated to move their workers into the new dorms.

"It is always good to have more facilities for workers. But the question is will bosses want to pay for them? Why would they want to pay more if they can save with cheaper housing?"

Housing workers at construction sites can be free, while a month's stay in a shophouse is about \$200 per worker.

Workers interviewed said they like living in purpose-built dorms as they are well-maintained and clean. However, they hope their suggestions will be taken into account, such as setting up money remittance shops within dorms.

Indian national V. Deva, 38, a shipyard worker who lives in a Tuas dorm, said: "I have to go to Little India or Boon Lay to send money home. It is quite tiring to travel out on Sundays."

In recent years, the Government has grappled with the need to roll out new dorms while dealing with unhappiness from some Singaporeans who dislike having them built near their homes.

However, the Manpower Ministry has pledged to improve housing standards after the report by the Committee of Inquiry into last December's Little India riot revealed that there is room for improvement in migrant workers' accommodation.

Manpower Minister Tan Chuan-Jin said in April that details of a regulatory framework for large dorms will be announced in a few months.



Where will they be

Nine new dormitories will be built over the next two years, providing nearly 100,000 extra beds for foreign workers.

Woodlands Avenue 10

Capacity: 4,100

Pulau Punggol Timor

Capacity: 4,000

Pulau Punggol Timor

Capacity: 14,000

Admiralty Road West

Capacity: 9,000

Tuas South Avenue 1

Capacity: 16,800

Tuas South Street 15 Capacity: 12,800

Tuas South Street 13

Capacity: 9,200

Sungei Tengah, along Old Choa Chu Kang Road

Capacity: 25,000

Mandai Road

Capacity: 2,000

Total: 96,900 beds

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Photo Gallery:

S'pore's largest foreign workers' dorm

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