

'Many options' for future development of S'pore

Minister cites building underground facilities as one solution to overcome land constraints

Wong Wei Han

Underground power substations? Underground reservoirs?

Singapore still has many options for development despite its physical constraints, and one way is to build more infrastructure underground.

This subterranean potential is among the plans the Committee on the Future Economy (CFE) is studying to make Singapore a vibrant global city and competitive economy, Minister for National Development

Lawrence Wong said yesterday.

"We're always looking at how we can expand our land and space options – and we have them. We have reclamation projects, indeed the Tuas mega port will be on reclaimed land. But we can also go underground," he said.

With projects like the Jurong Rock Caverns – a liquid hydrocarbon storage 150m below ground – Singapore is only "starting to scratch the surface of the potential for underground development".

"There is a lot more that we can

do beyond Jurong Rock Caverns. For instance, the utility or power substations that you see around – a lot of them can go underground. It will cost more, but also free up surface land for development."

He cited national water agency PUB's interest in building an underground reservoir as an example.

Mr Wong, who co-chairs CFE's future city sub-committee, was speaking at the annual general meeting lunch of the Singapore International Chamber of Commerce (SICC).

Building underground facilities has been in focus as the Government looks for long-term solutions to overcome land scarcity here. In March, an underground district cooling network – which produces

chilled water for air-conditioning for nearby areas – was launched at Marina Bay.

The Government also hopes to deploy more innovative technologies, such as driverless vehicles to transport goods across industrial estates, replacing the huge fleets of trucks on the roads today, he said.

"We can go beyond that to people-mover systems. In 15 to 20 years' time, I think it's very possible to have housing estates with mover systems taking people from where they live to the nearest MRT station," he said, adding that these systems can also be built underground.

Other large-scale projects are under way. The consolidation of port facilities in Tuas will free up land to

develop the Greater Southern Waterfront, a new central business district. Another new CBD, the Jurong Lake District, is also in the pipeline.

"These plans will take several terms of government to implement. These are not five-year plans. But this is also our competitive advantage, because we can plan long term. That's the way Singapore was built for the past 50 years."

For all these initiatives, a strong public-private partnership is important, he told around 260 guests attending the lunch yesterday.

SICC, celebrating its 179th anniversary this year, will focus on being relevant to member businesses amid the structural headwinds here, chief executive Victor Mills told reporters at the lunch.

Cost pressures have certainly taken a toll, he said, adding: "Anecdotally, for every one expatriate family being posted to Singapore for work, there are between seven and 12 leaving."

"But Singapore as a brand remains highly trusted for business services. We are still a hub for finance, for contracts, for arbitration. That element of Singapore brand will always be important."

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