

1997

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Akers-Jones outlines Govt's policy on NT development

THE Government has already moved a million people and has acquired more than 50 million square feet of private land for the last 20 years in the New Territories.

And there is no real conflict or disturbances or serious confrontation in carrying out the development process because Hongkong has adopted its own peculiar way of achieving its objectives, the Secretary for the New Territories, Mr Akers-Jones, said yesterday.

Addressing an audience of more than 300 students at the Chinese University of Hongkong, he outlined the Government's development policy and administration in the New Territories.

He said a sizeable portion of development land could only be made available by resuming private holdings.

"This is not an easy task or pleasant anywhere. But in Hongkong we have been very practical about this and have built up an elaborate system of payments.

"And we devised a land exchange formula which entitles them to a future land exchange of building land in the development area in return for the voluntary surrender of their private land holding.

In his opinion, the scale and pace of the New Territories development was unprecedented in any part of the world: "we are building six new towns and two industrial estates all at the same time," he said.

Under the present development programmes, the total population of the New Territories would expand from about 1 million people to 2.5 million by the middle of this decade, he said.

And about half of this total population will be living in public housing.

Mr Akers-Jones said the development programmes would serve three main purposes.

First of all, they provide all the necessary infrastructure and services generated by the public housing programmes.

Secondly, they maintain balanced development in the new towns; and thirdly, to improve the living environment so as to be able to attract people away from the overcrowded urban areas in Hongkong and Kowloon.

Talking about the development problems and opportunities in the 1980s, he said that the population pressure would be a major factor of consideration.

The main impetus of development stemmed from the Government's 1972 decision to rehouse the inadequately housed, he said.

"This is quite a different programme and policy than the resettlement programme of the fifties and sixties.

"Our development programmes are now geared to an annual production of 35,000 public housing flats.

"But our policy objective to house the inadequately housed is being overtaken by the growing pressure of people," he said.

Mr Akers-Jones said Hongkong's population increased by a quarter of a million last year.

"Such a massive addition to our population has obviously had serious repercussions on our development programme.

"So to meet this population pressure, Hongkong must continue to expand and additional land must be found for urban development," he said.

Surprisingly, he said Hongkong is not short of land to meet this growing demand.

"This is not difficult in itself for there is scope to develop beyond the existing boundaries of the six new towns," he added.

The Government has already commenced detailed design work on building a new town at Junk Bay which will cover an area of some 200 hectares with a target populations of about 250,000.

And the extension of Shatin new town northwards to Wukwaisha for an additional 100,000 people has been approved by the Government.

In addition, it is possible to extend Tuenmun both eastwards to Siulam and westwards beyond Tapshekkok, and is being examined, said Mr Akers-Jones.

"To sum up, we are not short of land or ideas, it is more a question of whether we have the capacity in financial, in economic, in manpower and material terms to do more than we are doing at the moment," he concluded.

Touching on the crucial year, 1997, when the New Territories lease will expire, Mr Akers-Jones said that it had no place in the Government's public development strategy.

Instead of what many people argue that private development will dwindle and the government development programme will not be sustainable when Hongkong draws closer to 1997, the New Territories chief noted that there has been mounting rather than diminishing interest in development of all kinds.

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irrelevant.