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Punggol East by-election

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make a difference?

EC sizes capped as part of cooling measures Higher stamp duty, restrictions on loans

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AIM review

IT STARTED with a review of town council management, in which Aljunied-Hougang Town Council (AHTC) fared poorly.

The AHTC, run by the Workers' Party (WP), blamed the performance lapses on the termination of its IT contract with AIM, an IT company owned by the People's Action Party (PAP).

WP also questioned the sale of software used by PAP town councils to AIM in 2010 - and the subsequent leasing back of computer systems.

The claim sparked a war of words between the opposition party, AIM and the PAP town councils. PAP town councils coordinating chairman Teo Ho Pin and AIM said the contract complied with the law.

Since then, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has asked the Ministry of National Development to review the AIM deal and the nature of town councils.

The review is expected in a month or two.

WP chairman Sylvia Lim filed a motion to pursue the matter in Parliament but withdrew it later.

National University of Singapore sociologist Tan Ern Ser said some may infer the review as sweetening the ground: "In the past 40 years, the PAP can quite easily sail through on the basis of its track record, but in the "new normal", it cannot count on this alone.

"(Therefore, the party) needs to be strategic and tactical in running its campaign."

Property

National Development Minister Khaw Boon Wan recently announced measures to cool the property market, like raising the Additional Buyer's Stamp Duty.

If the Government does nothing, the market "that is growing and growing would eventually burst under its own weight", he added.

Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam had also expressed concern about the situation.

"The reality we face is that interest rates are extraordinarily low, globally and in Singapore, and continue to add fuel to our property market," he said. "We have to take this further round of measures now, to check recent market trends and avoid a more serious correction in prices down the road."

Mr Khaw also vowed to close a loophole allowing property developers to sell free spaces for profit, after news broke of a \$2 million EC penthouse.

Nominated MP and Singapore Management University law lecturer Eugene Tan said: "To be fair, issues like an over-exuberant property market have been brewing for a while, and the timing of measures is arguably coincidental."

Transport

Singapore will have two new rail lines by 2030, Transport Minister Lui Tuck Yew said during a visit to Chinatown MRT station on the Downtown Line yesterday.

A few existing rail lines will also be extended, doubling the current rail network to 360km.

Mr Lui had said he understood commuter frustration: "I want to assure you that we have plans in place both in buses (and trains) to solve some of the near-term problems."

The plans follow a review of the Land Transport Master Plan by the Land Transport Authority.

The deputy chairman of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Transport, Mr Seng Han Thong, said transport developments are usually announced on an ad hoc basis.

He said: "The timing has nothing to do with the by-election. It has to do with the overall long-term improvements and enhancements to the existing transport network."

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