

# FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

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## Built environment sector shaping up for exciting time with new tech, opportunities

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For the first time in three years, things are finally looking up for the built environment sector.

Besides encouraging figures in growth and employment, new technology and opportunities in the industry are also ushering in an exciting time for shaping Singapore's skyline.

Drones, machine-learning, predictive maintenance and prefabrication are not just fancy buzzwords to

jazz up construction's image, but technologies actually being bedded in by companies with generous support from the Government.

This technology push may just go a long way in attracting more young local talent to the industry, which is usually associated with foreign labour.

Still, the built environment sector is often perceived as having one of the lowest productivity rates compared with others, and understandably so, due to the highly traditional ways of work and large amount of

manpower involved.

It is a perception that Building and Construction Authority (BCA) chief Hugh Lim is keen to shed. The BCA is the regulatory body of the construction industry.

"Actually our sector is a creative industry, because you really create something from nothing," he said to *The Straits Times* in an interview. "It is one of the original creative industries and it will need to continue to have creative people."

He also pointed to the importance of environmentally friendly buildings in an age when climate change is a serious threat.

Calling sustainable buildings the "gift that keeps on giving" beyond their unveiling, Mr Lim said the con-

verse can also have long-term ramifications.

"If you get it wrong at the start, you may be stuck with it for quite a while. If it's bleeding energy and not as efficient as it can be, it can be with us for a long, long time."

Mr Lim is cognisant of the fact that the lifeblood of a stunning Singapore landscape – if not of the nation itself – is in the ingenuity of its builders. "The starting point is that we are all proud of building Singapore for the future. That's really the lasting pride everyone in the industry can have," he said.

However, reality does hit home when it comes to attracting the younger generation to an industry that most may see as less glitzy than

other sectors.

It is a challenge Mr Lim recognises and one that he hopes BCA and built environment firms will meet head-on. "In today's war for talent with other industries, we remind our employers that they are not just competing with one another for talent," he said, adding that the BCA works with many companies to sustain a continued stream of manpower.

The statutory board's latest initiative, the iBuildSG LEAD framework, is meant to support leadership development by, for instance, developing networks and collaboration.

Recent statistics point to an upward trend for the sector as it posted its first employment gain in almost three years, while the Monetary Au-

thority of Singapore estimated the industry will grow 3.5 per cent this year, up from the 2.1 per cent forecast in March.

But no celebrations are in store yet for Mr Lim, who believes his work is far from done. For him, talent attraction remains the top priority for the survival of the built environment industry.

"It is not something that is going to be an issue overnight," he said. "But if we don't keep our eye on the ball, we will find ourselves one day – and maybe it's not that far away – not having enough people to do what we need to do."

"It's a never-ending battle."

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