

CLARIFICATION BY MINISTER CHAN CHUN SING ON HIS REPLY TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS REGARDING DEVELOPMENT WORKS AT KRANJI ROAD/ KRANJI CLOSE ON 26 FEBRUARY 2021

Mr Speaker, Sir

1. On 26 February 2021, I replied to Parliamentary Questions regarding development works at Kranji Road/Kranji Close. I told Parliament that JTC and National Parks Board (NParks) were conducting investigations into the execution of the land clearing at this site. The matter was subsequently also referred for further investigations by other agencies, including the Police. Police investigations have just concluded, and Police presented their conclusions to me and the relevant Ministers, earlier this week.
2. Sir, the investigations have established that when the matter arose last year, two JTC officers, the Project Manager, and the Deputy Director who was the Project Manager's immediate supervisor, had provided inaccurate information to their superiors in JTC. The inaccurate information had then been conveyed to Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) and subsequently incorporated into the answers I gave to the Parliamentary and Supplementary Questions in February 2021. Some of the information I presented to Parliament, based on what they had said, was therefore inaccurate. I will set out the details of what happened.
3. Members may recall that the site included a stretch of the former Keretapi Tanah Melayu (KTM) railway line. After the railway land was returned to Singapore in 2011, the site was earmarked for industrial development. At that time, the site comprised mainly scrubland. As the site was left vacant until development began, vegetation and trees were allowed to grow to provide green cover. During this time, non-native fast growing Albizia trees sprang up.
4. In 2019, the site was chosen to develop an Agri-Food Innovation Park to support Singapore's food resilience. JTC was appointed the Developing Agent. JTC proposed to retain the original KTM railway line as a green corridor through the site, changing an earlier plan to realign the Rail Corridor away from the site. In 2019, JTC appointed CPG as its consultant to carry out planning and design works for the site. The development of the site was to be carried out in phases.
5. With your permission, Mr Speaker, may I display a slide on the screen, please?
6. Plots 4, 5 and 9, in Purple and Yellow, had been approved by NParks for clearance in August 2019. In February 2020, a contractor was appointed to clear Plot 9. Then, in March 2020, a different contractor, Huatong Contractor Pte Ltd, was appointed to perform works for the remaining plots.

7. In February last year, I had informed the House that *“Between end December 2020 and 13 January 2021”*, unauthorised clearance work was carried out on 4.5 hectares of the site. The 4.5 hectares I referred to are the two areas marked in Red on the slide.
8. Investigations have since found that clearance of the Red areas commenced without NParks’ approval before December 2020. The investigations suggest that the two JTC officers had given inaccurate information to their JTC superiors about this. I will come back to this later.
9. I also refer Members to the area marked in Blue. When I spoke in Parliament, I told Members that we would thoroughly investigate the execution of the land clearing on the Kranji site. This included verifying the status of the various other plots on the site, including the Blue area. Investigations have now established that the Blue area, amounting to 2.8 hectares, had also been cleared without NParks’ approval. Part of Plot 1, edged in Green on the slide, had also been cleared before NParks granted approval in November 2020.
10. My statement that the contractor had *“not been paid for the over-clearance in January and December”* also needs to be corrected. Investigations have found that some payments had been made for clearance, including tree-felling, for parts of the Red areas during this period. This erroneous information was provided by JTC Contract and Procurement (Construction) Division, who processed the payments without realising that the payments included felling of trees in areas that had not been approved for clearance. There was no intent by JTC staff to mislead. Investigations have also found that payments were also made for clearance of some parts of the Red areas and the Blue area before December 2020, which we now know had been done without approval.
11. In addressing the Parliament Questions on 26 February 2021, I had said that the unauthorised land clearing *“was discovered by JTC’s Project Manager on 13 January 2021 during his site visit. All clearance works onsite were suspended immediately and remain suspended today.”* However, as I stated earlier, investigations have since found that the Project Manager who was in charge, knew of the clearance before 13 January 2021. His immediate superior, the Deputy Director, also knew. It appears that they misrepresented the facts and gave inaccurate information to their superiors.
12. As for clearance works being suspended immediately from 13 January 2021, JTC has clarified that it stopped all tree felling, and focussed on that as constituting clearance works. Some other minor work, like vegetation clearing, did continue beyond 13 January 2021.
13. Sir, I want to say this: the above statements are based on Police findings. Police have consulted Attorney-General’s Chambers (AGC), and referred the matter to AGC. AGC is now considering the matter.
14. In these circumstances, I considered whether to wait for AGC’s decision whether to bring charges against officers before updating Parliament. This

is for two reasons. First, what I have said above is based on the Police view, which could well be contested in Court, if the matter proceeds to Court. And a court could take a different view of the facts. Second, we need to be fair to the persons who may be charged; setting out the facts here should not prejudice their fair trial.

15. After discussing with AGC, I was satisfied that I could update Parliament now on what the Police have found. But I emphasise to Members that the above is the Police's view of the facts, and the matter could go to the Court.
16. There is a natural follow up question: why did the officers do this? Sir, if and when the matter is brought before the Court, the reasons and motives of the officers will also likely be dealt with, apart from establishing the facts. Therefore, pending any Court proceedings, I have confined myself to an account of the facts as discovered by the Police investigations. We should be very circumspect about speculating on motives.
17. May I also add that in the case of this Kranji site, the whole site has been earmarked for clearance and development. However, regardless of development plans, there are processes to be followed, including getting timely approvals from NParks, and that process was not followed. NParks has confirmed that if the due process had been followed, it would have given approval subject to the necessary conditions being met. However, regardless whether approvals would have been forthcoming, the JTC officers had a duty to give the correct information to their supervisors and MTI. Failure to do so is wrong, and cannot be excused.
18. Finally, Mr Speaker, I would like to briefly touch on the timeline of investigations: NParks' investigation began on 21 February 2021, just before my reply in Parliament last year. This investigation took some months, and uncovered discrepancies in the information provided. But the two JTC officers I had earlier mentioned disputed that they had given misleading information. Given the unclear situation and the factual disputes, we first wanted to rule out any possible corruption. CPIB was asked to investigate, and concluded that there had been no corruption. The matter was then referred to the Police to get to the bottom of the factual disputes, establish what had happened, and whether there was criminal conduct disclosed. The Police concluded their investigations earlier this month. As I said, the Police updated me and the relevant Cabinet Ministers on their findings earlier this week, and have referred the matter to the AGC.
19. The Ministry of Trade and Industry is reviewing the investigation findings with JTC. Apart from possible Court proceedings, MTI and JTC will take appropriate disciplinary and administrative actions against the individuals responsible, as necessary.