

More aid for easy access to buildings

BCA to foot up to 80% of costs to make older buildings wheelchair friendly

■ BY JOYCE TEO

THE Government yesterday said it would do more to encourage owners of older buildings to provide better accessibility for wheelchair users and others facing access difficulties.

The Building and Construction Authority (BCA) will now draw on a special fund to pay up to 80 per cent of the costs for retrofitting buildings with such features, up from 40 per cent.

The maximum sum per building has also been raised from \$150,000 to \$300,000, said the BCA, at the start of its inaugural Friendly Built Environment Week and annual seminar yesterday.

The money will come from a \$40 million Accessibility Fund that BCA launched last year.

Parliamentary Secretary for National Development Mohamad Maliki Osman, who launched BCA's Friendly Built Environment Week, said the fund was available to all types of private buildings except for landed homes.

It is to encourage owners of buildings built before 1990 to provide basic accessibility features in their buildings such as an accessible toilet on the ground floor.

Should they want to do more, such as upgrading lifts to make them friendly to wheelchair users, those with visual or hearing impairments, and the elderly, they can also tap on new funding support of 40 per cent, BCA said.

After 1990, all new buildings and existing buildings which have undergone major additions and



The Building and Construction Authority said the maximum funding per building has also been raised from \$150,000 to \$300,000. ST FILE PHOTO

alteration works are required to provide accessibility features.

Since the fund was launched last year, the owners of 19 buildings have made use of it to provide basic accessibility features, such as Paradiz Centre in Selegie Road and OG@Orchard Point.

BCA hopes to see more.

Mr Lim Puay Tiak, honorary treasurer of the Handicapped Welfare Association, said that while buildings are generally friendlier nowadays, the older ones still present problems.

"Barrier-free access has improved over the years," the wheel-

chair user of more than a decade told reporters yesterday. But some private places such as hotels need to work on providing barrier-free access.

To help wheelchair users and others looking for barrier-free places, the BCA has set up a portal, in which there is information about accessible buildings and infrastructure.

It has also come up with an accessibility rating system, whereby it assesses the user-friendliness of buildings. So far, 400 buildings are in the system.

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