

■ First NEA upgrade in over 30 years ■ \$1.9m facelift ■ Seven months to complete ■ 111 stalls



Visitors to the refurbished market can choose from a variety of food stalls. The clean loos there have received a Happy Toilet "five-star" rating, comparable to those found in hotels. PHOTOS: LIANHE ZHAOBAO

Customers say they like the greater space and better organisation

■ BY TEH JOO LIN

Kebun Baru Market back in business

CROWDS thronged the Kebun Baru Market and Food Centre yesterday morning as it officially opened after a seven-month, \$1.89 million facelift - its first National Environment Agency upgrading since it was built in 1976.

The wet market at Block 226D, Ang Mo Kio Avenue 1 was razed by an early morning fire 10 years ago and needed extensive repairs, forcing stallholders to move to temporary stalls in a nearby car-park.

They returned to the market several months after the February 2000 blaze, but moved out again last June when the renovations began.

The Kebun Baru Market is one of six markets and food centres which reopened in January after major upgrading that cost more than \$20 million in all. The others are in places including Beo Crescent

in Tiong Bahru, Jalan Kukoh in Outram and Tanglin Halt.

At Kebun Baru Market's official opening yesterday, Ang Mo Kio GRC MP Inderjit Singh said stallholders told him business was better at the new market.

It houses fewer stalls - 111 compared to the 168 previously - which means it has become more spacious, with larger stalls and wider passages between them.

Mr Singh said some stallholders decided to call it a day instead of continuing to do business after the upgrading programme.

The fall in numbers meant fewer stalls selling similar items, which translates to

better business for the ones setting up shop at the new market, he added.

Customers interviewed yesterday morning said they were happy with the refurbished market.

Mr Willie Goh, 60, a warehouse supervisor, said: "It's improved a lot. It's more organised and there is space to walk. The environment has improved."

Mr Sayeed Mohamed, a 51-year-old businessman, said he liked the wider passageways.

"Previously they were very narrow, you could bump into people while walking," he said.

Fruit seller Ivy Ng said her business

has improved "slightly" at the new market after expanding her shopfront from two stalls to four stalls.

"This allowed us more space so we can display our fruits in a more beautiful manner," said the 37-year-old.

But fishmonger Tan Ong, 61, was worried business would dip as long-time customers in Ang Mo Kio moved to other areas.

When asked, Mr Singh said he was working with the town council and grassroots leaders to organise activities near the market to attract more residents to patronise the stalls.

National Solidarity Party members in-

cluding former Non-Constituency MP Steve Chia also made their rounds, chatting with residents and selling party newsletter North Star News, yesterday.

Asked if he had plans to stand for election, Mr Chia was coy. He said: "You will find out... we're waiting for the electoral boundaries."

He greeted Mr Singh and the two men spoke for a while.

Mr Singh later told reporters: "We had this event so I think they knew there was going to be a crowd here.

"Of course they are free to do whatever they want. This is a stronghold of Ang Mo Kio and I've no issue with anyone visiting our area."

He added that Mr Chia told him he thought that a single member constituency could be carved out of the Ang Mo Kio GRC.

Mr Singh replied that he would not know at this point, but he did not think it would happen. "I told him it won't be, we're part of Ang Mo Kio. I think my stand is that parties are all guessing where the single wards are going to be. So they are going round and making their own guesses."

joelin@sph.com.sg