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Everyone saw how Jurong Industrial Estate (JIE) grew from almost nothing to become a thriving industrial town in just years. But not many witnessed the hardship behind it. Can you share more with us?

It was all about survival. Not of JTC. Not of a single person. But of Singapore and its people. The project was watched very closely by the leaders of the country and the pressure was on. Regardless, knowing the importance of this project to the nation was more than enough to motivate us. Once JIE was planned, we knew we had to do whatever was needed for it to be a success.

We spent many long hours on the project including the weekends as well as public holidays working on and inspecting the progress of JIE. There were even times that we went to our bosses’ house to work! It was also not uncommon for us to be bringing industrialists to JIE on weekends even when many bulldozers were still on site.

How else did your team and you strive to be more customer-friendly?

The usual perks offered are common knowledge. There was pioneer status given to companies, tax-free periods, and so on. Yet, more than that, there was a lot that went on behind the scenes to expedite processes for companies that we were going after. One instance I recall involved how we sped up land allocation. For a company to be allocated a piece of land or a factory unit as well as to start their operations, they needed approval from many agencies. What all the agency counterparts would do was consult one another beforehand to identify and correct any possible issues. This helped to streamline the process for the company once they wanted to come in to JIE. Every agency was constantly working together towards the JIE vision.
The 60s and 70s were years of trial-and-error for JIE. What would you say exemplifies it as a success?

If you went along Jalan Ahmad Ibrahim in JIE’s earlier years, you would notice that all the factories you saw were operated by big-name, multinational companies. This was a deliberate move to demonstrate the confidence international investors had in our young country. I’m proud of that view because it showed how the bold decision to transform Jurong had borne fruit, created jobs and helped jumpstart industrialisation for Singapore.