

**HD**      **Sydney: Sale of rich harbor history sparks outrage**

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(MENAFN - Arab News) Ron jennings an 84-year-old with a penchant for brightly colored shirts has for decades lived in an **apartment** block with views of sydney harbor which until now money literally could not **buy**.

as a public housing tenant jennings paid a modest rent for his home in the rocks which along with almost 300 other public housing homes near the sydney harbor bridge is set to be **sold**.

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the sell-off has enraged the community of millers point one so old and historic it contributed to australia's earliest european settlement and is listed on the state heritage register.

they argue they are being kicked out of the city in favor of the rich.

'the part that upsets me the most ♦ can you ever remember a whole suburb being evicted? because that's what's happening" jennings told afp.

the government decision ends years of speculation about the fate of the area which abuts the aus\$6 billion (\$5.6 billion) barangaroo development set to house a luxury six-star **hotel** and casino and the rocks considered the birth place of white settlement in australia.

with still-soaring sydney **property** prices the highest in the country and **chinese** investors keen to snap up real **estate** in australia's biggest city the new south wales government is pushing asset sales to help balance the books.

waterfront properties come at a premium in the city where house prices rose 4.9 percent in the last quarter of 2013 alone according to the australian bureau of statistics.

millers point a small suburb which sits behind the long closed wharves of walsh bay has seen a growth in high-rise and waterfront developments in recent years as developers moved onto neglected properties with the wharves now home to luxury apartments and cafes.

the government minister who made the decision pru goward said the 293 properties in millers point and the rocks were being **sold** due to high maintenance costs the major investment needed to make some of them liveable and the "high potential **sale** values."

she said the cost of restoring some of the homes to heritage standard was as high as aus\$800000 each and she could not justify sinking millions of dollars into a small number of properties while 57000 families were on the wait list for public housing.

'this decision was not taken lightly but it is the right decision in the interest of a sustainable fair social housing system" she said adding that the proceeds would be reinvested into social housing around the state.

within days of her announcement residents held a community meeting attended by hundreds of people in which they vowed to fight the sell-off.

barney gardner who has lived in millers point his whole life said there was no reason why low-income households should be locked out of the city and the community broken up.

'why should developers get to live here? why aren't we allowed to have the same dues to use the same housing as rich people" he asked the meeting.

'i haven't got much family but youse are" the 65-year-old told the meeting to cheers and applause.

no date has been suggested yet for the sales with goward saying that officials would work with tenants in coming months to help with their relocation with every resident offered reasonable alternative accommodation.

maritime workers have lived in millers point for generations and these links between the people and the **property** make it a rare if not unique precinct with evidence of human settlement spanning all historical phases in australia since 1788.

'the degree of integrity of that area the way that we can read the layers of the maritime history of australia on that **site** is really second to none" historian shirley fitzgerald told afp.

many houses in millers point were erected by the government in the early 1900s after an outbreak of the bubonic plague saw many homes torn down.

'the government built public housing in order to make sure that there was a viable maritime community to service the government wharves" fitzgerald said adding that shops and pubs were also provided.

'so the whole thing was like a **company** town for the maritime services **board**" the body which was in charge of the housing for many years and which allowed people to pass on houses to family members provided they were working on the wharves.

fitzgerald believes the sell-off will have a damaging impact on the city.

'what kind of a city can you have when you can't have any working people unless they're on a huge salary package living in the city? cities just don't work unless you have areas of affordable housing."

'that harbor was a working harbor and the lives and the blood and sweat and tears of thousands and thousands of working people have gone into making it work for us and now it sees to be okay to turn around and kick them out."

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