

INTERMEDIATE

Cubans can now build their own homes



Times are changing quickly in Cuba. Cubans can now build their own houses for the first time in 50 years. The country's president, Raul Castro, has announced changes to help the nation's housing shortage. For the past five decades, people had to rely on the government to provide them with houses. There was no such thing as housing loans or a property market. The new reforms will allow people to get loans to build their own homes. There will still be many restrictions. All new properties must follow strict building guidelines. The government has announced dimensions for new houses that all architects must stick to. Mr. Castro explained his decision live on television, telling his people: "I've given you this amount of space....Now build your little home with whatever you can."

Housing has become a serious problem in Cuba. There are now too few houses for people to live in. Overcrowding is reaching record levels as more and more people live with their families in tiny properties. Cuba's government has had difficulty keeping to its targets of building 100,000 new homes per year. The situation has been made worse by three huge hurricanes that hit the island in 2008. Hundreds of thousands of homes were destroyed in the fierce winds and driving rain. One potential Cuban homeowner, Jose Santana, was delighted with the news. "My dream to have my own home may soon come true," he said. This may be easier said than done. The average wage in Cuba is just \$17 a month, and most building materials are only available on the black market.

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READING / LISTENING

TRUE / FALSE

Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. People in Cuba are attending free house-building workshops.
- b. People could build their own homes 55 years ago.
- c. Cubans have been unable to get a housing loan for the past 50 years.
- d. People in Cuba are free to design their houses any way they choose.
- e. There aren't enough houses in Cuba for people to live in.
- f. Cuba's government couldn't manage to build 100,000 houses a year.
- g. Very bad weather in 2008 added to Cuba's housing shortage.
- h. Average wages in Cuba are only \$170 a month.

SYNONYM MATCH

Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------|
| 1. quickly | a. to be had |
| 2. rely | b. limits |
| 3. reforms | c. likely |
| 4. restrictions | d. depend |
| 5. stick to | e. huge |
| 6. serious | f. salary |
| 7. tiny | g. fast |
| 8. potential | h. follow |
| 9. wage | i. changes |
| 10. available | j. small |

PHRASE MATCH

Match the following phrases from the article

(sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Times are changing | a. on the government |
| 2. changes to help the nation's | b. record levels |
| 3. people had to rely | c. rain |
| 4. properties must follow strict | d. housing shortage |
| 5. live on | e. television |
| 6. There are now too | f. market |
| 7. Overcrowding is reaching | g. quickly in Cuba |
| 8. fierce winds and driving | h. than done |
| 9. easier said | i. building guidelines |
| 10. only available on the black | j. few houses |