

01/07/1997

Helping Bumis to own shophouses

Stephanie Rajendram

IPOH, Mon. - The Johor Government has made it compulsory for all housing developers to build shophouses costing RM150,000 and below to enable more Bumiputeras to go into business.

Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman said that this was in line with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's call to all Menteris Besar to provide suitable space in towns to enable Malays to carry out business activities.

Speaking to reporters after opening the Pasir Salak Umno delegates' meeting yesterday, he said Malays had been encouraged to take part in franchise businesses, and one way of helping them was by providing affordable shophouses in both small and major towns.

Also present were Perak Umno liaison committee chairman and Menteri Besar Tan Sri Ramli Ngah Talib, who is also Pasir Salak division chief and State liaison committee deputy chairman, and Pasir Salak deputy division chief Datuk Seri Megat Junid Megat Ayub.

Ghani said in Johor, shophouses could be priced as high as RM500,000 per unit. "But with the right designs, we can build shophouses priced at less than RM150,000."

He said the State Housing Development Authority had been asked to co-ordinate the building of such shoplots in the State.

"Johor's quota for low-cost houses is 40 per cent. Recently, the 40 per cent quota was divided into four components: 20 per cent of homes should be priced at RM25,000 and below; 10 per cent between RM50,000 and RM80,000, and the remaining 10 per cent should comprise shoplots costing less than RM150,000."

This way, he said, a developer could still make profits by way of cross-subsidies.

In his opening speech, Ghani stressed the importance of upholding social justice.

"Social justice must be seen to be practised in the country and towards this end, Malay businessmen must be allowed to take part in the country's economic progress."

He also said Johor hoped to eradicate poverty.

He said in Segamat, for instance, 1,156 hardcore poor would be allowed to participate in a 1,600ha Felcra scheme that would provide monthly dividends to boost their incomes.

"I hope to disclose the success of this scheme in two weeks' time," he said, adding that this poverty eradication project was similar to the one carried out by the Perak Government, which is believed to be the first State with no hardcore poor.

Ghani said he did not agree with Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu's statement that Bumiputera interest in several privatised projects had dwindled despite various efforts to sustain and enhance their participation.

He said one of the benefits of privatisation was that it provided an avenue for Bumiputeras to go into business and thereby enjoy the country's prosperity.

He said the problem was that some Bumiputera businessmen who earlier participated in such projects, later sold them.

Ramli, when commenting on Samy Vellu's statement, said he did not know in what context the Minister made the claim but said Malay businessmen

should only venture into privatised projects if they were viable and if they had the interest and capability to do so.

"For example, if you ask a fisherman to become a businessman in the city, he would refuse because it is not part of his work culture. Neither can you expect a grocer to work in a steel mill," he added.

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