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Revive recovery fund, urges Koh

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PENANG, Sun. - The Federal Government should consider reviving a recovery fund for abandoned housing projects, Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tse Koon said.

He said it was opportune for such a fund to be restored, so as to provide the push for stalled housing projects to resume.

The recovery fund (Tabung Pemulihan Perumahan Terbengkalai) was introduced in the 1980s during the previous recession, with Bank Negara's support to help housing developers and banks to restructure.

"On our (State Government's) side, we have appealed to the Federal Government and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has given an assurance that he will consider it," Koh said.

He was speaking at the launching of the integrated housing and commercial project for low-income earners in Jalan Sungai today by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Koh thanked Abdullah for allocating time from his busy itinerary to attend the launch which was earlier scheduled to be officiated by Dr Mahathir.

Rather than relying solely on the fund, Koh said the State Government had persevered to resume several stalled projects which it had initiated since 1993.

A total of 46 projects for low- and low-medium cost houses had been approved, comprising 46,246 units which can accommodate the housing needs of about 22,000 families.

Out of this, 9,300 units are ready and occupied while 1,000 are still awaiting occupancy certificates.

Another 23,000 units are currently under construction while construction for another 12,800 will start soon.

"The economic crisis affected many private housing projects, but the State Government has consistently placed priority on the housing needs of the people," he said.

Among revived projects is the Jelutong Expressway on which work has recommenced, bringing an additional 5,500 low- and low-medium cost houses.

The State Government, Koh said, had been encouraging the building of more low- and low-medium houses by the private sector, particularly in the north-east district where most rent-controlled affected premises were situated.

Koh said although there was limited government-owned land in the district with most State Government and municipal council-owned land occupied by squatters and staff quarters, there were plans to re-use more of this land to build houses.

However, Koh added the State would continue to look into the housing needs of the people, particularly government employees.

He said about 1,000 employees working in Georgetown have to commute from Prai, Kulim, Sungai Petani and even as far as Alor Star.

The Penang Island Municipal Council's RM65 million project for the hardcore poor and low-income groups is sited on a 3.2ha plot between Jalan Sungai, Jalan Veternari, Jalan Patani and Sungai Pinang.

It will also be used to accommodate tenants affected by the repeal of the Rent Control Act.

Expected to be completed by August 2001, the project will house 1,081 low- and low-medium cost units in 19-storey flats atop a four-storey

podium comprising 442 shoplots.

It will also include a 3,307 sq m recreation area, a four-storey civic complex housing a market, community hall, library and meeting room, a five-storey car park which can accommodate more than 1,000 car parks and parking bays for more than 1,000 motorcycles.

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