

Penang CM: Action on state rep if land not inherited
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Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng refuted allegations that a DAP assemblyperson acquired a piece of land against the Pakatan Rakyat's CAT (competency, accountability and transparency) policies on state land ownership.

Lim said Padang Lallang assemblyperson Tan Cheong Heng (left), who is in the centre of the controversy, does indeed own a piece of land, and a 60 year lease extension on it had been recently approved by the State Land and Mineral (SLM) Department.

However, that plot of land, 2.6 acres in size, owned by Tan and his brother, Tang Chong Hock, is ancestral land, he added.

Lim, who is DAP national secretary-general, said Tan was not acquiring a new piece of land, but extending the lease of a plot that was previously owned by a grandparent.

The lease expired in the 1980s and Tan has been paying TOL rental up to July this year.

He had tried thrice to apply extension for the lease but was rejected twice by the SLM department, until recently.

"The people who are attacking the state government and Tan over this are playing political games," Lim told reporters in Komtar today.

Lim took a potshot at BN, saying during its tenure, there were officials nicknamed "Mr 10 Percent" as they were known for accepting bribes or commissions from government transactions.

"But here, it is the people who get the 10 percent. When they extend their land lease, they can be given up to 90 percent discount for a 99 year lease," he quipped.

Huan's revelation

Lim was responding to Parti Cinta Malaysia vice-president Huan Cheng Guan's revelation that Tan recently acquired the plot of agriculture leasehold land in Seberang Perai.

He gave Lim up to Sunday to explain how Tan managed to acquire the land when there is a state government policy, announced in March 2008, that prohibits state reps from doing so.

Huan (right), who is former Gerakan vice-president, is planning to take the case to the Penang branch of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission if Lim fails to explain the matter.

Tan had clarified that he had registered the piece of land under his and his brother's name in accordance with Section 384 of the National Land Code for a 60 year lease, which expires in 2071.

He had already explained the situation to Lim, and told the CM that the land will be used for an oil palm plantation, during a meeting in 2008.

Meanwhile, Lim said the process (of Tan acquiring the land) has been explained in a detailed report by the SLM Department which was distributed to reporters at the press conference.

The document, he added, was rather technical but would clear many "misunderstandings" surrounding

the land issue.

"If the land was not inherited by Tan, if this is new land and the assemblyperson paid a premium for it, we will take the necessary action," he told reporters in Penang today.

Government officials barred

Lim insisted that government officials - MPs, assemblypersons and city councillors - are barred from applying for or purchasing state land.

He added that since Pakatan took over the helm of Penang's leadership, there were no such applications.

Everyone who applies for state land is not exempted from application fees, unless the land is under temporary occupation license, where the occupant has to pay rental for it, he said.

Lim said many were unaware of the state government's land policy where it tries to return land to the people, especially when their lease expires.

He added that for new villages, expired leases are automatically extended, for 60 years with an 88 percent discount, and 90 years for 99 percent cut.

"This policy also applies to those who live outside new villages, whether they are Malays, Chinese, or Indians," Lim said.

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