

Affordable housing: Who is BN really defending?

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By Susan Loone

A Malay NGO has urged the BN not to politicise the issue of land for affordable housing just to fill their pockets come the impending 13th general elections.

Penang Malay Congress president Rahmad Isahak asked why does the BN want the state government to build affordable homes on a 0.44 hectare site in Taman Manggis (Jalan Zainal Abidin) when it could only accommodate 140 units.

Rahmad said it had already been announced that a plot of land belonging to the Penang Municipal Council along Jalan SP Chelliah has been earmarked for homes affordable to those earning below the RM3,000 salary range.

He further questioned why homes for low-income earners were not given priority during the BN administration, prior to 2008.

"The leaders then were happier to develop state land with federal allocations. Surely, there are some hidden gains which will benefit the pockets of some," said Rahmad.

"Looks like the BN is bankrupt of political issues and every issue that they highlight seems to backfire on the BN itself," he added.

Rahmad said if the BN were really interested in building affordable homes for Penangites, it should acquire the said land in Jalan Zainal Abidin.

Otherwise they should stop the "cheap politicking which would eventually undermine the BN itself," Rahmad told the party leaders.

Land for poor sold for profit

The issue first came to light when state BN Youth chief Oh Tong Keong "revealed" that the state government under Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng was "taking land belonging to the poor and selling it to businesses".

Oh, who is state Gerakan Youth chief, was then referring to the second phase of a public housing project in Taman Manggis, where the first phase involved 320 housing units that were completed in 2005.

The second phase, he added, was scrapped by the DAP-led government and the land in 2010 sold to a private developer to build a specialist medical centre.

But state executive councillor on housing Wong Hon Wai said the plans to build affordable homes in phase 2 had not been submitted to the MPPP.

Recently, state BN chief Teng Chang Yeow said if the opposition did not "expose" this matter, the people would still be in the dark about the private hospital development,

which included a 30-storey building, a 19-storey hotel, a six-storey hospital and a five-storey car park.

Meanwhile, Rahmad said that phase 1 of the plan was approved on May 10, 2001 but until March 8, 2008, no effort has been made to obtain an allocation for phase 2 from the federal government.

For seven years before the Pakatan Rakyat government came to power, the previous BN administration failed to defend the rights of the people who needed such homes, he added.

"However, they are now making an issue out of it. We look at it as a political agenda which has become more important than defending the rights of the lower income group. This is what the BN is practising now," said Rahmad.

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