

BN: Penang has a DOG-matic, not CAT gov't

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By Susan Loone

Bayan Baru BN coordinator Por Joo Tee has challenged the Penang government to release data related to affordable housing to differentiate the "myths from the facts" surrounding the issue, which has hogged the media for several months.

Por asked the state to come up with proper tabulation on how many units have been constructed before and after 2008 to ensure transparency, instead of blaming BN for highlighting the issue.

He added that instead of wasting time blaming the BN or opposition for the lack of affordable housing in Penang, it would be better for Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng's administration to spell out in writing the real situation.

"We want the details on when the projects on low and medium cost homes were conceived, build and launched so that the media, rakyat and the BN can verify all the facts," he said in a press conference today.

"If the state government cannot do this, then may as well change the CAT (competency, accountability and transparency) to a DOG(matic) government," he quipped.

The BN has been hitting out at the current administration for not being serious about affordable homes, especially after the recent Auditor-General's report had stated that from 2008 to 2010, none of such units have been build in Penang.

Lim, however, has shot back with various statements saying his government, through the Penang Development Centre, has build 11,596 affordable homes in the state.

'Freehold land progressively sold'

The issue of affordable homes again hit the streets of Penang when a plot of land in Taman Manggis, which the BN claimed was meant for affordable homes, was sold to a private developer to construct a 30-storey building including a hospital.

Meanwhile, BN Batu Lanchang coordinator Lee Boon Ten has accused the Penang government of progressively disposing of land belonging to the state and municipal council.

Lee said most of the land sold are those with freehold status.

This included land in Taman Manggis, which was recently highlighted by the BN to have been sold to a private developer to build a medical centre, and the plot in Bayan Mutiara, where plots of a mosque and school have allegedly "disappeared".

"The state government cannot hope to get back such land unless it is purchased with a premium, unlike those without freehold status," said Lee in a press conference today.

"The state government has to come clean on this matter as the people must decide whether these freehold sites should be sold, for perhaps one day, there would be none left," he added.

Lee said this while responding to allegations by Guan Eng, who questioned why BN was raising the issue of affordable housing only when it is in the opposition and not during its tenure as the state government.

'BN serious about affordable housing'

Lee was accompanied by state BN publicity chief Tan Cheng Liang and other BN coordinators to present facts and figures to prove that the BN had been serious about affordable housing in the state.

The statistics he quoted include: 35,761 units of low-medium-cost (LMC) houses from 1990 to 2008; in the same period, the BN has build 4,615 low-cost flats for rent and purchase; while between 2004 to 2008, the previous government had approved the construction of 33,514 units of LMC.

He added that LMC have been build in Taman Manggis, Kedah Road, Rifle Range, Batu Lanchang and MacCullum Street.

"Lim should not disregard such efforts by the BN as they are facts," said Lee.

Lee reiterated that if BN wins the mandate to rule Penang again, the coalition pledges to build 20,000 units of low-cost flats for rent and purchase within five years, amounting to about RM1 billion in allocation to cater for the people's housing needs.

"Even as the opposition, we are trying to raise this issue at state level. We are helping by trying to make people understand the issue," said Lee.

Lee said the BN was "quite perturbed" by the fact that despite 104,000 applications for low-cost housing, the state has decided to sell off land for the poor, like Taman Manggis, to a private developer to build a hospital.

"Is this for financial gain or for something else that we are not privy to? Despite knowing there are many applications for low cost housing, the state does not want to build the units or maintain the land," he added.

"This is administratively incorrect although it might seem commercially all right. But the state government is not a commercial entity to make profit but take care of the people's needs," he stressed.