

'BN sold more land in Penang than Pakatan'

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By Susan Loone

Warding off intense criticism that it had been selling off state land, the Penang government said today its record of sales was nothing compared with that of the previous BN administration.

Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng revealed that the former BN government had sold three plots of land to private companies during its tenure, prior to 2008.

Lim was referring to plots in Tanjung Tokong (980 acres); near the Jelutong Expressway (325 acres) and Batu Kawan (750 acres).

In the Tanjung Tokong Reclamation Agreements dated 1990 and 1999, the developer was given the right to reclaim and develop the land at the price of RM1 per square foot.

As for the Jelutong Expressway, under agreements dated 1997, 2002 and 2003, the developer was given the right to reclaim the land in exchange for constructing the highway at an estimated cost of RM300 million.

In this deal, Lim said, the developer was allowed to pay RM25.4 million over 10 years from 2005, saying "this is surely a record for length of payment period".

'BN acted dishonourably'

Lim accused the state BN for having acted "dishonourably with lies and threats" against the Pakatan Rakyat state government, although he has repeatedly said that land sales are conducted via open tender, where only the highest bidders were accepted.

"While the Pakatan government will not submit to wild threats from BN and Perkasa, we want to expose the lies by BN that demonstrates the huge disparity between land sales by the two coalitions," he said.

Lim said his opponents were making a "mountain out of a molehill" on the sale of 1.1 acres of land off Jalan Zainal Abidin, which has been slated for a private medical centre.

State BN Youth chief Oh Tong Keong has alleged that Lim has sold land earmarked for public housing but the chief minister said the plot is too small for housing.

Oh, who is state Gerakan chief, has offered to buy the land from the state government and Lim has agreed to the sale.

Lim further took the BN to task for "refusing to explain" the RM5 million in profits allegedly made by two Umno leaders when they sold a parcel of land in Balik Pulau.

Lim had accused the duo - state Umno deputy chief Musa Sheikh Fadzir and state election strategy director Omar Faudza - of being "land brokers", for purchasing the land from 31 Malay villagers and then selling it to a private developer within four months.

The duos have denied that they raked in millions of ringgit from the transaction, saying instead they were forced to sell the land in Kampung Terang as their company has been "blacklisted" by the state.

Lim also denied that there was less government-owned land than in 2008, adding that the Pakatan administration was "acutely aware" of the value of land in a state like Penang.

"For this reason, Pakatan has ensured that there is more land now owned by the state government, both local governments and the local state agencies combined than on March 8, 2008, when Pakatan took over," claimed Lim.

`Private businesses

In an immediate response, state BN chief Teng Chang Yeow said the two Umno leaders had purchased and sold the land in a private transaction.

"If the duo had purchased the land from the BN state government, we have the right to ask them to return the money but they bought it from a private concern and sold it to a private company. It is a private business transaction," he told a press conference in Penang today.

As for the plot of land on Jalan Zainal Abidin - which the state BN Youth has offered to purchase from the state at RM450 per sq ft - Teng said the party is waiting for Lim to respond.

"There are members and businessmen who are willing to fork out the money to buy the land, but we are now awaiting an official letter from the CM," he added.

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