

Be responsible, DAP's CAT government told
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By Susan Loone

Former Penang municipal councillor Tan Gim Hwa is upset that the current state government has chosen to mislead the people on the sale of land, which it said was sold at RM3 million less than the highest bid.

Recently, state executive councillor Chow Kon Yeow had asked Tan to explain the sale of a piece of land belonging to the Penang Municipal Council (MPPP), which now houses the One-stop Midlands Centre, a once-popular shopping mall along Jalan Burmah.

Tan urged the state government not to divert from the issue of the Taman Manggis land sale - reserved for public housing - but answer it as Penangites are waiting for the reply.

"Be a responsible government!" exclaimed the 76-year old Tan, a former state Gerakan chief, during a press conference held at his home in Penang.

"I have retired since 1996 and cannot recall exactly what Chow meant in the press. If they would like to seek my consultation, please ask nicely," added Tan, who was sacked from Gerakan in 2000.

'MPPP makes money from quit rent'

Tan was responding to Chow's statement where he said MPPP has been accused of selling a number of plots of state land after Pakatan Rakyat took over the government in 2008, but in actual fact, it has purchased more than it sold.

Tan, a founding member of Gerakan, then went on to explain how the MPPP makes money for the state, which includes the collection of quit rent, saying he left RM200 million when he left his profession.

He added that most of the land sold during the time period Chow had mentioned were sold in "a good manner".

Tan clarified that there was no regulation stating that the highest bidder will get the tender as there is always a base price which is set by the Valuation Department.

He said the Town Planning Department will at times specify that certain facilities must be inserted when a plan for development is submitted.

Examples of these, added Tan, include a mini park when there is a need for a green lung or mixed development when there is a need to increase the collection of quit rent.

"Mind you, all these conditions were set by different government departments, unlike now, where all are set by Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng," said Tan.

"Today, the MPPP is no longer as independent as before as it is all manipulated by one person - Guan Eng," he quipped.

On the Midlands land, Tan said there was a company which had wanted to tender the land for a service apartment.

Development tycoon Goh Choon Lai had then proposed a mixed development (hotel, apartments, offices and shops) for the land, Tan added.

He explained that the reason for rejecting the highest bidder (service apartment) was because there was no guideline for such a project at that time, and a mixed development would "create more income" for MPPP.

"In the end, we knew the decision was correct. We used the money from the sale and also the projected quit rent to build the Penang International Sports Arena (PISA) in Relau," he said.

"Unlike today, Lim could pay the developer - SP Setia - RM50 million to refurbish PISA with a 30-year lease, 87 units per acre of development density, which is transferable," he added.

Anwar's crony?

Meanwhile, Tan said the MPPP used to sell land with 99-year leases unlike what is being done by the Pakatan Rakyat government.

He added that the "adverse effect" of selling government land with a freehold title will be seen in years to come.

"Are we going to Malacca to find someone to be held responsible for this?" queried Tan.

Chow had also mentioned that the Prangin Mall development - another piece of land allegedly sold cheaply - was tendered by the same company - Idris Hydraulic Properties - who won the bid for Midlands.

"This is a biggest joke I ever heard of. Please tell Chow to ask opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim who owns Idris Hydraulic. Do your homework before accusing others," Tan told Chow.

When asked further on the identity of those behind Idris Hydraulic, Tan said, "I cannot mention the name as he is also close to me."

"I was in politics for decades, I never avoided questions, never tried to divert any topic," Tan said.

"I do not want to get entangled in issues with those who are unfit to be the government, it is a waste of my time and energy," he added.

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