

No RM150mil extra costs for palace
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Works Minister Shaziman Abu Mansor today denied allegations that the construction cost for the new Istana Negara has increased by RM150 million for interior decoration works, in his winding-up speech in Parliament today.

However the minister did not give details, stopping at just a denial.

He was answering allegations brought up by opposition parliamentarian Mahfuz Omar (PAS-Pokok Sena) during the 10MP debate last week on alleged cost overruns in the project.

shaziman abu mansorShaziman (right) also answered concerns raised about the lack of facilities for tourist at the existing Istana Negara (National Palace).

"Facilities are being planned for the comfort of tourists at the new Istana Negara in Jalan Duta," Shaziman said.

On the issue of illegal foreign workers at the palace project, also brought up by the opposition, Shaziman vowed to take action against errant contractors if the allegations are proven to be true.

"I have asked the Construction Industry Development Board to investigate, using data from the Home Ministry. If it is true, the companies involved will be blacklisted."

Problematic public projects Ngo Kor Ming (DAP-Taiping) queried the works minister about government action against contractors of problematic public projects which have become an eyesore to the nation.

collapsed half of roof of the Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin Stadium in Kuala TerengganuHe quoted as examples the collapsed RM280 million stadium in Terengganu (left), the new specialist hospital in Johor Baru which needed defect rectification work worth RM14.7 million, and the collapse of the Perak Development Corporation project in Grik which saw RM5 million going down the drain.

"In Singapore, when the Nyiru highway project collapsed, its architect was jailed and the licence of the engineer was revoked. In Malaysia, what is the government's action and policy to save the public from more projects which embarrass the nation?," he asked.

Shaziman answered that he will look to ensure that only those who are qualified can be a government contractor, adding that the 60,000-odd on the books right now is too high a number.

"It is too easy to become a contractor, that is why in the future in projects with high technical requirements, we propose a prerequisite so that only qualified contractors will get them," said the works minister.

He added that contractors who make mistakes, he had told CIDB to come up with amendments to its act. And in the case of a loss of life, the contractor in question will be remanded.

NONE "We only want responsible contractors...We need the industry to give protection to those who will use the facilities they build," he said.

Palace project under scrutiny

Afterward, Mahfuz (left) stood up to ask an additional question on why the contract to build the Istana Negara was awarded to Maya Maju despite the contractor lacking solid credentials.

"They don't have any experience handling large projects, they are not even a Class A contractor at the time the contract was awarded. Why did the government award them the project?," asked the PAS vice-president.

"For a class A project, if it is 'design and build', it depends on how the proposal was made and how the Finance Ministry trusts the capabilities of the contractor in question," Shaziman explained.

However, he added that for big government projects in future, the ministry will shortlist the construction companies with capabilities to handle the projects, and only capable ones will be awarded the job.

Opposition parliamentarians have continued to question the Istana Negara project after it was revealed that it will cost RM650 million to complete, way higher than its initial cost of roughly RM400 million.

This was in addition to other problems pointed out by the project's detractors - which included allegations of the contractor employing illegal foreign workers and the project's directly negotiated award, which some parties found questionable.

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