

PM's residence : '3 days rental could buy 1 low-cost house'
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An opposition lawmaker has questioned the need for the government to pay a whopping RM6 million a year for the rental and maintenance of the prime minister's official residence in Putrajaya.

"It's definitely a waste of taxpayers' money. It means we are paying more than RM16,000 a day," Liew Chin Tong of DAP told Malaysiakini.

"We can buy a low-cost house for needy people with three days' worth of rental for the residence," he said.

He noted that the government is also paying a huge sum for the deputy premier's official residence.

In a written parliamentary reply to Liew, Abdullah had revealed that the government forks out RM6 million a year for rental and maintenance works for his official residence, Seri Perdana.

According to the reply, RM4,149,000 is paid as rental to Putrajaya Holdings - the master developer of the federal administrative capital - while the remaining RM1,896,616 is for maintenance works.

The government also pays RM3.4 million (RM2,273,888 for rental and RM1,129,992 for maintenance) for Seri Satria, the deputy premier's official residence.

In total, this works out to about RM26,000 per day for both residences.

Liew, the Bukit Bendera MP said the prime minister and deputy prime minister do not need such "luxurious" residences at the expense of taxpayers, and that the sum can be channelled for better use.

"Look at No 10 Downing Street (the British prime minister's residence), it is just a humble building. Even the White House proper (US president's residence and office) is smaller than Seri Perdana, which is just a residence," he said.

The government is bound by an agreement with Putrajaya Holdings to pay the sum for 25 years, from the time the first occupant of Seri Perdana - then premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad (left) - moved into the complex in 1999.

'More being paid in rent'

Mahathir had said the Putrajaya project had been funded entirely by the private sector and that government money was not involved. He was fending off criticism over the development of the mega-project.

However Liew pointed out: "We are now paying close to RM1 billion to Putrajaya Holdings annually to rent all the government offices in Putrajaya, and the amount is increasing year

by year since the government is occupying more offices."

According to Putrajaya Holdings' official website, its shareholders include Petronas via KLCC (Holdings) Sdn Bhd (64.41 percent); CIMB Group Nominees (Tempatan) Sdn Bhd (for and on behalf of Kumpulan Wang Amanah Negara, 20 percent); and Khazanah Nasional Bhd (15.59 percent).

The Seri Perdana complex, located in Precinct 10, is a sprawling complex that covers 16 hectares and comprises three blocks for a main reception area, banquet facilities and the residential area.

According to AFP, Abdullah lives in the complex with his wife, daughter and son-in-law and their children.

"It is wasteful to spend so much money on renting the prime minister's house when the country is facing such tough times," said opposition parliamentarian Hatta Ramli from PAS.

"Even though the money is going back to a government-linked company, this should not be the case as the government should really own the building the prime minister occupies," he told AFP.

"What happens if the prime minister somehow gets evicted?"

Chief minister of opposition-controlled Penang state Lim Guan Eng questioned the payment of rent to Putrajaya Holdings.

"We can understand paying maintenance, but rental does not make sense," he said.

"This also begs the question as to who are the directors of the company and who gets all the profit made by the company."

RM16 mil spent on renovations

The high cost of building, renovating and maintaining the complex has always been a focal point for the opposition.

According to figures revealed in the House in 2005, the building of Seri Perdana cost RM24.17 million, with maintenance costing up to RM2.9 million a year. An additional RM15.81 million was spent for renovations that year as well.

It has also been alleged previously that the building actually cost about RM200 million to build.

In 2006, an opposition MP revealed that a whopping RM20 million was allegedly spent for the security system in the premier's official residence.