

Homes in prime urban land for Penang Malays

NST-19/12/2006

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GEORGE TOWN: The alleged displacement of Malays from key urban areas due to skyrocketing property prices has always been a controversial issue in Penang.

However, the racial imbalance may soon be a thing of the past following the purchase of three parcels of prime land on the island by Pelaburan Hartanah Bumiputera Berhad (PHBB).

Second Finance Minister Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop said the land would be developed by next year, with a selection of affordable homes and commercial lots on offer.

The properties include a 45ha freehold parcel in Teluk Kumbar, a 2.44ha freehold area at Gelugor and 23,500 square metres of leasehold land in Pengkalan Weld.

PHBB purchased the Teluk Kumbar land from Island and Peninsular Development Sdn Bhd (I&P) and the other two pieces from Tenaga Nasional Bhd (TNB) for a total of RM116.5 million.

"These are the first pieces of land bought by PHBB since it was formed in September.

"It so happens that the land is in Penang and PHBB was able to buy the properties below the market price," he said, adding PHBB would appoint developers to begin construction work in the first quarter of next year.

Nor Mohamed added that the government was in the process of working out an innovative mechanism to ensure Bumiputeras, especially from the low-income group, would be able to buy the units.

"One of the options is a two-

generation loan, which will enable buyers to settle their loan over a longer period.

"We want to make sure the target group benefits from this effort."

Some 5,000 families here could expect to own the houses once the projects were completed.

He said the units under the project would cost RM40,000 upwards.

Nor Mohamed said PHBB was also in the process of negotiating with Islamic religious councils nationwide to enter into a joint venture to develop idle *wakaf* land.

He said the councils held a vast land bank and it was only logical to develop it for the benefit of all.

Nor Mohamed was speaking at the signing of the sale and purchase agreement between PHBB, I&P and TNB yesterday.

PHBB was represented by managing director Kamalul

Arifin Othman, I&P by managing director Datuk Jamaludin Osman and TNB by vice-president Datuk Abdul Razak Abdul Majid.

Also present was Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon.

It was reported that the government formed a property trust called Yayasan Amanah Hartanah Bumiputera, which is managed by PHBB, to increase Bumiputera ownership of prime properties in key urban locations.

The trust was formed with an initial capital of RM2 billion to ensure that real estate beyond the reach of the Malays could be purchased by way of a collective fund.

When presenting Budget 2007, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said PHBB was in the process of buying several prime properties in Kuala Lumpur to be developed into commercial space.