

Politicians have hijacked PR1MA, says house buyers group

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By Leven Woon

PR1MA has been deviated from its original purpose of providing affordable housing, Chang says.

KUALA LUMPUR: The National House Buyers Association (HBA) today accused politicians of hijacking the implementation of 1 Malaysia Peoples Housing Scheme (PR1MA), deviating the affordable housing away from its original intent.

Speaking at a roundtable discussion on rising property prices, HBA secretary-general Chang Kim Loong said PR1MA had eased many of its housing requirements in an apparent attempt to gauge profits.

He said for example, it has increased the ceiling price of a house from RM350,000 to RM450,000 for this year and are allowing second time house buyers to purchase a PR1MA unit.

“You say you are building affordable houses, but now the ceiling price has shot up to RM450,000.

“You say you don’t have enough houses for first-time house buyers in the market, then why would you need to open it up for second-time house buyers?”

“The implementation of PR1MA has been hijacked by the politicians,” said Chang, whose association had played an instrumental role in urging the government to implement PR1MA.

He said when HBA first mooted the idea of having an affordable housing scheme, it was for the government to utilize its land bank and to build houses at minimal costs.

However, profiteering has since set in and now PR1MA is even allowed to form joint-ventures with private developers, he said.

“They say the reason they do so is because they don’t have the technical know-how. If that is the case, you can just employ professional consultants.

“You are developing government land, hiring professionals would only incur minimal costs.

“But now they have a list of 15 developers and we have learned that some of them are actually blacklisted by the housing ministry. How can a government project use developers

that are blacklisted by the government?

“We are against joint-ventures, why would you want to share the profits?” he said.

Only 40% for affordable housing

Chang also claimed that PR1MA is mooting to only commit 40% for affordable housing and the balance would go to high-end luxury houses.

“If they are building some shop lots on a big estate, I can understand. But they are thinking of building a complex, for what? Don’t forget they got the land for free from the government,” he said.

PR1MA was setup in late 2012 to provide affordable housing for urban dwellers. It received 500,000 applications for 80,000 houses as the end of last month.

Chang was attending a roundtable held by Parti Sosialis Malaysia featuring its Sungai Siput MP D Michael Jeyakumar and NGO representatives from among others, Permas, KL and Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall, Jihad for Islam and Friends of Kota Damansara (FoKD).

Jeyakumar, in his opening speech, said the housing supply has been mismatched with the demands.

He said while the bulk of demand came from the lower-income group, developers however seem to be only interested in building high-end houses.

He also noted that the salary among the working class was kept at a low level in order to help the country’s exports, hence the government has an obligation to help the working class to own a house.

The participating members later resolved to issue a memorandum to the Housing and Urban Wellbeing Ministry.

They are requesting, among other things, for the government to give free land titles to urban pioneers, amend relevant laws to empower local councils to take charge of low-cost flats, setup a trustee board in every state to build affordable housing for the poor.

The board, they said, should build houses measuring 20 x 40 square feet and the units can only be sold back to the board.

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