

National housing council to look into PR1MA



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A Soon to be established national council on affordable housing will scrutinise all aspects of the various state-owned housing developments and projects, including 1Malaysia People's Housing Project's (PR1MA) financial liabilities.

The proposed National Affordable Housing Council (NAHC) is part of the Housing and Local Government Ministry's (KPKT) initiative to alleviate redundancies among the agencies and address the growing public discontent over the high prices of homes.

Minister Datuk Zuraida Kamaruddin said a Cabinet paper will be tabled and all housing-related entities will be housed under KPKT. The paper will also include the transfer of PR1MA from the Prime Minister's Department to KPKT.

"Until and unless we take over PR1MA, then we can look into the files. Now, I cannot say either it is true or not (about the company's liabilities)," she said in Putrajaya yesterday.

Zuraida said after streamlining all the housing projects and agencies, the ministry will form the NAHC.

The establishment of the NAHC, expected to take place by August this year, will allow the ministry to have a wider scope on all the relevant agencies, including monitoring, coordinating and scrutinising all the agencies under the ministry.

Presently, the state-owned agencies that are involved in housing developments are Syarikat Perumahan Negara Bhd with 1Malaysia Mesra Rakyat Housing, Prime Minister's Department's 1Malaysia Public Servant Housing, Rural and Regional Development Ministry's Housing Aid Programme, Ministry of Federal Territories' Federal Territories Housing (Rumawip) and PR1MA.

The formation of NAHC is part of the new government's election manifesto — to put all agencies related to the development of affordable housing under one roof and to focus on the housing needs of the B40 (bottom 40%) and M40 (middle 40%) groups.

“Once we get the approval, we will establish the council immediately. Our officers are ready with ideas and paperwork on how we should pursue it. We expect the council will be established by August,” Zuraida said.

PR1MA, the brainchild of former Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Razak, was established in 2012 with the aim to develop, build and sell affordable homes.

It functions as a private developer with financing sourced from lenders, but guaranteed by the government. However, PR1MA faces stiff rivalry from private developers who have a greater depth in a very competitive market.

In July last year, PR1MA raised RM5 billion from the debt market via sukuk programmes guaranteed by the government to undertake its development.

Some of PR1MA's projects have been criticised for failing to attract buyers either due to its locations or high prices.

PR1MA had previously claimed its projects have been well received and it has over one million registered potential buyers. As of November 2017, PR1MA sold a total of 12,640 units of homes.

Meanwhile, Zuraida said a special committee will be formed to study the possibility of demolishing what is left of the Highland Towers structures.

She said the study will also review whether the Highland Towers site can be repurposed for other development.

“It is a long outstanding issue. The place has become an eyesore and a hive of criminal activities such as drug dens,” said Zuraida, who is also the Ampang MP.

In December 1993, one of three blocks of the Highland Towers Condominium at Taman Hillview, Ulu Klang, collapsed, killing 48 people.