

Make data on low-cost homes public

Malaysia has an inadequate supply of affordable housing. But does that mean state governments should buy all unsold low-cost houses to resell or rent out to the lower-income group?

This was suggested by Parti Amanah Negara in Johor, where there are 70,000 to 80,000 unsold units. In Selangor, unsold units exceed 100,000, says the Real Estate and Housing Developers' Association, which has called for an in-depth study.

We already know that the so-called surplus of low-cost housing in Selangor, for example, could be an over-estimation. Bank Negara Malaysia has noted that "a significant number" of low-cost houses may "fail to meet the quality and location requirements of households". There may be building defects, such as waterproofing and pipe leakages, apart from these houses being far from schools and hospitals.

Who funded and built the defective houses in bad locations in the first place? Were they built by private developers to meet quotas? Or were these built using public funds by unscrupulous contractors? Is it only a problem in Selangor, or in other states as well?

There should be a central database on which every Malaysian can register his interest and how big a loan he can take. The data would come in handy to decide where houses should be built and at which price point. It would also show who has been building substandard units.

There should be a public registry of acceptable but unsold affordable homes. Defective houses or those in bad locations should be blacklisted as they would distort the supply data. The data should also indicate how long a house has been left unsold, plus its distance from a school or hospital, for this purpose.

Public disclosure is key because the country cannot afford to waste any more resources on ensuring everyone has a roof over his head.