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Forced out to suburbs

Skyrocketing property prices and rentals in KL have led an increasing number of urban poor to the outskirts, leaving foreign workers to take up residence in the city



By **BAVANI M**
bavanim@thestar.com.my

IF THE government continues to sell prime land in the city and engage into joint-venture agreements favouring developers, the capital city will eventually turn into a ghetto due to lack of affordable housing for the urban poor, warned a Kuala Lumpur member of parliament.

Tituwangsa MP Datuk Johari Abdul Ghani said certain areas in Kuala Lumpur were already turning into mini ghettos, and looking shabby and dirty.

At the same time, Malaysians were also shunning to work and live in such parts of the city due to high rentals, in favour of the outskirts, giving rise to the heavy presence of foreign workers, he said.

These foreigners, he added, were being cramped into small units by their employers as the rentals in the city was high.

"As a result of sky-high rent, many property owners have no choice but to lease or rent out

their shophouses to employers of foreign workers who would pack each unit with over 30 people," he said.

Johari, who is also chairman of UDA Holdings Bhd, said migrant workers did not mind living in cramped quarters as long as they could save on transportation cost while the poverty stricken residents opted to leave the city.

"They (migrant workers) work at construction sites, restaurants, hotels, and offices as labourers, cleaners, sweepers, security guards, waiters, cooks and janitors in the city," he said.

He predicted that foreign workers were probably going to outnumber the locals living and working in the city as more locals leave in search of affordable housing.

Kuala Lumpur is home to migrants

National Public Complaints and Welfare Service Centre (Pusat Aduan Rakyat Malaysia (PAR) chairman Datuk A. Chandrakumanan said some parts of Bukit Bintang along Jalan Bedara, the Sun Complex area, Chow Kit, Jalan Silang, Jalan

As a result of sky-high rentals, many property owners have no choice but to lease or rent out their shophouses to employers of foreign workers.

– DATUK JOHARI
ABDUL GHANI



Petaling and Jalan Metro Perdana in the city had a large community of migrant workers living in old flats and shophouses.

A check by *StarMetro* at some of these spots found that it is not too far-fetched to say that foreigners outnumbered Malaysians.

In Jalan Silang for instance, the entire stretch of pre-war shophouses were run and operated by Bangladeshi and Nepalese businessmen, while in Petaling Street,

the Nepalese and Myanmar workers were running the shops and stalls on behalf of their employers.

Over in Chow Kit and Jalan Masjid India, the number of Indonesians was increasing each month.

These areas are looking shabbier than ever.

It had been reported that out of six million people in the Klang Valley, 222,843 were registered foreigners residing in Kuala Lumpur, 577,427 were illegal immigrants registered under the Home Ministry's 6P programme, and 438,425 were illegal immigrants yet to be registered.

Severe shortage of affordable housing

Apart from the rent, Johari explained that many people, particularly young executives, shunned the city as it was too exhaustive to commute.

Make no mistake, plenty of young working adults were eager to live in the city, especially newly married couples, among them is

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KL mayor: It is very challenging to build affordable homes

KUALA Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) is facing a challenging time to deliver affordable housing to low-income earners as it is no longer cost-effective, said mayor Datuk Seri Ahmad Phesal Talib.

He said the public could not expect DBKL to utilise funds in housing projects that would not generate income for the local authority.

"If we were to build a low-cost housing project today it would cost us between RM200mil to RM300mil for just one housing project.

"Even if we rent it out at RM250 a month, it would take more than a decade to get the returns from the investment," he said.

Ahmad Phesal was commenting on the affordable housing crisis in the city and the many joint-venture projects and land swap deals DBKL had embarked on with developers to redevelop old government housing schemes in the city and build public facilities.

Ahmad Phesal said that entering into joint-venture agreements/land swap deals with developers by increasing plot ratio and density was the only way to get developers

to build affordable housing for the residents and to leverage on the percentage of units (affordable housing).

"We used the same arrangement with PPAIM (The 1Malaysia Civil Servants Housing Programme) launched recently by the Prime Minister in Bukit Jalil.

"We cannot force them (developers) to build housing for the poor without giving them certain incentives," he said.

PPAIM is a government-initiated public-private partnership project using the cross-subsidy method. Middle and lower income civil servants are sold affordable and quality houses ranging between RM150,000 and RM300,000 per unit, depending on the size of the built-up area.

In March, former Federal Territories Minister, Tan Sri Zulhasnan Rafique criticised DBKL for developing a 11.3ha of prime land belonging to DBKL in Setapak through a joint venture/land swap deal that had seen the size reduced to a mere 3.8ha.

The balance 7.5ha would be used to build a high-end mixed development project with a gross development value worth millions.



Too pricey: Ahmad Phesal showing a model of a RUMAWIP scheme displayed at DBKL building. Most urban poor cannot afford PPR flats let alone these units.

Last year, Cheras MP Tan Kok Wai highlighted that DBKL had been disposing prime plots through joint venture deals that were not benefiting the poor.

He said the deals were not made through open tender and there were existing facilities on the land.

Tan cited the velodrome in Cheras, DBKL's Health, Engineering and Mechanical departments in Jalan Cheras and another plot along Jalan Pinang.

Federal Territories Minister Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor told *StarMetro* in March that the Public-Private Partnership Unit (Ukas) under the Prime Minister's Department was currently in negoti-

ations with developer for a proposed mixed development on a 3.97ha land that was currently home to 8,000 residents living below the poverty belt.

The land, which currently housed the PPR Sri Pahang in Bangsar, was built 40 years ago for the poor.

Tengku Adnan said the developer would have to do some cross subsidy to enable the units to be resold to the residents at an affordable price.

"We are trying very hard to persuade them to give us back the units at cost price.

"We will allow them to build expensive units too but we will retain a percentage of the units as low cost units," he said.