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## Brunei-Muara running out of land for housing



(Top) Terrace houses at Rimba National Housing Scheme. (Above) Director of Housing Development Department Marzuke Hj Mohsin (C) speaks, while Hj Mohd Rozan (R), permanent secretary at the Ministry of Development looks on. Pictures: BT/Yusri Adanan

Dewi Mohd Sofri  
BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN

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LAND area available for housing development in the Brunei-Muara District has become increasingly tight due to the high demand for new housing projects.

This has resulted in the challenging task of meeting public demand for housing, Hj Mohd Rozan Dato Paduka Hj Mohd Yunos, permanent secretary at the Ministry of Development, said yesterday.

"We are running out of land space in Brunei-Muara district" for housing development, Hj Mohd Rozan said, adding that there were only a few areas that could still be developed for housing and industrial activity.

During a dialogue session as part of the ministry's Customer Day activities yesterday, he said most residents in the Sultanate live in Brunei-Muara, with an average 1,200 people applying for housing each year.

Marzuke Hj Mohsin, director of Housing Development Department, said: "The need for houses is growing. By 2017, it is projected that 30,000 houses will be required and the government is making an effort to meet the demand.

"(How) to accommodate that figure becomes our problem. If you want to move to Belait or Tutong (District), it would not be a problem as there is still a lot of land there," said Hj Mohd Rozan, who chaired the dialogue session between senior department officials and penghulu and chief villages.

Areas that can still be developed in Brunei-Muara include Lumapas (near the boundary) and along the Meragang highway, Tanah Jambu.

He added that the ministry was doing its best not to clear forests to make space for housing development, as it was the country's priority to conserve them for the Heart of Borneo (HoB) initiative and reserve land for agricultural purposes.

"We must not only look at it in terms of our needs but also the national requirement," he said.

The permanent secretary was explaining the rationale given by Marzuke on why the government was moving from building detached houses to semi-detached and terrace houses, which would be the new housing format in the future.

"The land will not grow (bigger) but the need to build houses will always be there," he said, adding that the government's main concern now was managing the land and sustaining it for the long term.

Marzuke also talked about the 17,500 houses under the National Housing Scheme which were in the process of being built, of which 7,500 were being handled by the Brunei Economic and Development Board.

At present, 5,500 are already under construction, while 3,500 are in the process of being tendered. Meanwhile, the tender for 1,500 houses are already given out with construction to begin in mid-2010. Marzuke said that 13,500 houses were expected to be completed in 2011 and the remaining 4,000 in 2014.

The director assured the community leaders that construction of the houses would be faster, as the ministry would reduce the average waiting period of 15-20 years.

Hj Jumat Akim, chief village of Kampung Putat, brought up the issue of land rights, whereby after 55 years of lease on government land, occupants were required to pay a premium to renew their lease, which can be a burden for them.

Commissioner of Land Department Pg Abdul Wahab Pg Hassan responded that the land leases, when expired, give the government an opportunity to claim it back. The payment rates which can be made throughout a period of time is seen as reasonable and is one of the ways for government to gain revenues.

"If we don't pay, then the government will not function," he said. Imposing tax on land for revenue is something that the government has not done, he said. Other land issues raised include Temporary Occupation Licence for industrial development.

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