

Published by: The Brunei Times, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2010

URL:

<http://www.bt.com.bn/en/news-national/2010/03/19/prefabricated-houses-are-not-substandard-says-expert>

## Prefabricated houses are not substandard, says expert



A handout computer-generated image of the houses to be built by Bina Puri Holdings, which will construct 2,000 homes for the national housing scheme. Using prefab houses will allow the project to be completed within two years. Picture: Courtesy of Bina Puri Holdings Bhd

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BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN

Friday, March 19, 2010

PREFABRICATED houses are not low quality, contrary to public perception, and will be used in the construction of upcoming national housing schemes, which in turn will speed up the process of people getting houses, an expert told The Brunei Times yesterday.

Dr A R M Muniruzzaman, Head of Civil Engineering Programmes at Institut Teknologi Brunei (ITB), explained the benefits of "prefab" houses on the sidelines of final day of the "Seminar and Workshop on Modular Design and Construction for Housing Projects in Brunei Darussalam".

Prefabricated houses are made from factory-made components that are shipped and assembled on site.

Dr Muniruzzaman, the keynote speaker and facilitator at the workshop, said that there was a misperception among the public that prefabricated house were low quality.

"They are actually high quality, sometimes even better quality than conventionally built houses," Dr Muniruzzaman countered.

The use of the prefabrication method in the 4,000 houses to be built by the Brunei Economic Development Board (BEDB) and the 2,000 houses being built by the Housing Development Department (HDD) will "pave the way for future prefab methods", he added.

Using conventional building methods, 2,000 houses could take 10 to 12 years to complete, he said, adding that using prefab houses could result in the project being completed in about two years, which in turn means people getting their houses sooner.

"Doing the construction in a factory-controlled environment, the benefits are firstly very good quality. If you can go for mass construction, then the price is reduced significantly, and although it is prefabricated you can have lots of choices in terms of getting the houses you want," said Dr Muniruzzaman.

Whilst the most important factor was the significant amount of time saved in construction, he added, the prefabrication method of building houses was also eco-friendly, energy efficient and there was reduced wastage in terms of construction materials.

Dr Muniruzzaman also proposed to Ministry of Development that Brunei host international exhibitions on prefab products and methods so that they could make informed decisions and choices.

He further proposed that full-scale show houses be built to show the public and change their misperception that prefab houses were "light and flimsy".

Lim Keng Yong and Lim Chong Sit, from Surbana International Consultants in Singapore, told The Brunei Times that the prefab method was being used in Singapore to construct affordable housing.

"In Singapore, we construct 10- to 50-storey buildings using these materials, so considering that, construction of a two-storey home is guaranteed to be safe and of quality. Prefab methods can be even used to construct beyond 50 storeys; the possibilities are endless," they explained.

Marzuke Hj Mohsin, Director of the Housing Development Department, said that the department had been looking at the use of prefab methods of construction for some time before the 2,000-house project, and that the workshop was a means of inviting different players in the industry to discuss using it more in Brunei.

"For this initiative to take off we need to engage everyone," he said.

The two-day conference, organised by the Ministry of Development, drew to a close yesterday, with the closing ceremony attended by Development Ministry Permanent Secretary Hj Mohd Rozan Dato Paduka Hj Mohd Yunos, who presented certificates of participation to the attendees.

The Brunei Times