

REBRANDING PUBLIC HOUSING

' REMOVING STIGMA

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EFFORTS to improve, upgrade and rebrand public housing, now largely labelled as "af-

fordable" or "cheap", are aimed at creating a housing system where people of different social backgrounds live together without differentiation of class or creed.

The measures also aim to remove the stigma associated with public housing.

Housing and Local Government Minister Zuraida Kamarudin said providing homes for the people was more than just about building property and giving them a space to live in.

She said the move would promote cohesiveness and boost so-

cial mobility, which was impaired by housing segregation based on income groups.

"This effort is aimed at removing the stigma associated with social classes.

"Those living in low-cost flats are linked to poverty.

"There is even a housing programme called PPRT (Hardcore Poor People's Housing Project under the Rural Development Ministry).

"The nation has changed and we must also change.

"We are looking at renaming (People's Housing Projects) as part of rebranding efforts.

"One of the projects that will take off is in the integrated property development Bandar Malaysia. Some 10,000 houses will be built, of which 30 per cent are studio units allocated as transit homes and rented out to youths and young couples with no children," she said in an interview.

She cited Singapore's Housing and Development Board (HDB), which has been successful in addressing the shortage of public homes and reorganising housing estates in the city state.

»» Turn to **Page 9**

Ministry working with state govts to identify sites for housing projects

>> From **Page 8**

"There is no sense in staying in a big house if you only have one child, for instance, so HDB flats is the better option," she said.

Zuraida said shared amenities, such as swimming pools and parks, would foster better ties among the people.

"There is a township where those living in the affordable (private project) housing scheme could also use the swimming pool there."

She said the ministry was working with state governments to identify suitable sites to be developed for public housing projects.

Another issue, she said, was the lack of integration due to the diverse sources of public housing projects.

"For instance, PRIMA is owned by the Finance Ministry so the Housing and Local Government Ministry has no knowledge on the projects although it should be under our jurisdiction as the ministry is in charge of housing."

"Some of these (PRIMA) projects are located in 'godforsaken' areas with no access to public transport.

"I intend to have PRIMA maintained, but it should be placed under my ministry.

"The Federal Territories Ministry has its own schemes, Rumawip (Rumah Wilayah Persekutuan) and PPA1M (housing for government staff)."

She hoped all housing initiatives and programmes could, one day, be placed under one roof to enable a uniformed system in monitoring and planning.

"By the middle of next year, we will have a firm policy and get the ball rolling," she said.

To achieve this, it is learnt that the ministry is working towards integrating housing data in all states.

She said the ministry was committed to addressing issues plaguing public housing schemes including maintenance, vandalism and cleanliness.

"We are adopting the National Community Policy to address this, while also looking at redeveloping housing schemes that are over 30 years old, as well as implementing the rent-to-own scheme for overhang (unsold units) to reduce the (housing) stock," Zuraida said.