

Hajiji confident housing industry will bounce back faster

Chris Maskilone

KOTA KINABALU: Local Government and Housing Minister Datuk Hajiji Mohd Noor is confident that the housing and real estate industry will bounce back faster.

"We hope it will bounce back faster than we anticipate. Hopefully, by next year. As you know, some economists already forecast that Malaysia will be among the earliest Asian countries to recover from the present economic slowdown, maybe even as early as the end of this year," he said.

Hajiji also reiterated his assurance that the business community, especially the housing developers, will not be unnecessarily burdened by the Ministry's policies.

"It is important that both the public and private sectors work hand-in-hand towards the good governance of the delivery system. The State Government is a business-friendly Government and would assist within the confines of the law," he said.

Speaking at the Sabah Housing and Real Estate Developers Association (Shareda) annual dinner here Saturday, Hajiji also assured that he would seriously look into several proposals submitted by President Datuk Susan Wong

when she led a delegation from the association to pay a courtesy call on him recently.

"Although I have no announcement to make to you tonight, much as I would like to, suffice for me to say that we will help wherever we can," he said.

Among the proposals submitted by Susan were the review of Building Setbacks for Sabah together with the Controls and Guidelines and to relax the condition of the housing developers' licence by not penalising developers who start site preparation works early while pending issuance of the said licence provided.

"I would also like to give you my assurance that my Ministry is constantly looking into ways and means of improving and protecting the housing industry, not just from the house buyers' point of view but also for your own benefit."

Towards this end, Hajiji said as mentioned by Susan, his Ministry was organising for the first time the Sabah Housing Conference to be held here on August 18 and 19.

He hoped that with the conference, the professionals and key players in the housing industry together with the Ministry would be able to take the stan-

dard of the Sabah housing industry to even greater heights.

On another note, Hajiji urged housing industry key players to step up efforts to adopt the Green Building Index (GBI) Malaysia to reduce the negative impact of the industry on the environment.

He said it was pertinent for key players to be aware of their responsibilities in providing adequate, affordable and quality housing and buildings, and at the same time be conscious of preservation of our environment.

He said housing is not only an essential basic need that provides shelter for all of us from the rain, sun and danger but also a key economic sector in our nation's economy.

"As you are aware, the Government always strongly supports this key economic sector to stimulate growth in our country," he said.

Hence "Building Towards A Green Future" is aptly chosen as Shareda's theme for this year to reflect on its zest to upgrade products to build environment-friendly and energy efficient housing development in the State as characterised in the GBI Malaysia launched in May 2009.

It also reflected Shareda's awareness

of the prevailing sentiments not only from the business angle but also from the social responsibility perspective.

He said while maintaining profitability would be a challenge in these challenging times, merging business bottom lines with social responsibilities such as environment conservation had also become part and parcel of management priorities within the key player organisations.

He said as developers they could actually turn this challenge into an opportunity to design and construct green, sustainable buildings that can provide energy savings, water savings, a healthier indoor environment, adoption of recycling and greenery in their projects.

Hopefully, he said the theme would result in increased awareness among property and real estate players to factor in the "green buildings" or "energy saving homes" which harmonise with the local climate, traditions, culture and surrounding environment, aesthetics and liveability in the choices of site, design, material use, quality finishing and landscaping and make it as their key selling points in the housing market in the future soon.

Hajiji said the State Government recognised the importance of the hous-

ing sector to spur economic growth in the country and Shareda had taken an exemplary, active and vital role in assisting the State Government to regulate housing development in the State.

"Through the years, my Ministry has been able to tap on the expertise and the suggestion of Shareda members in its efforts to enhance the rules and regulations, to protect the interest of the house buyers as well as in formulation of new laws and regulations governing issuance of development on review of building setbacks for Sabah, uniform Building By-Laws, etc."

He also commended Susan for being the first woman as the President of Shareda and he has no doubt in her capability in discharging her duties.

"As the Minister in-charge, I am proud to state that Shareda truly has come a long way since its early days to be nurtured in the property and housing sector before it becomes a matured sector.

"I am impressed that Shareda with a grouping of over 147 development companies today, has undertaken billions of ringgit worth of properties to provide housing and purpose built buildings and complexes for the State," he said.