

Sunday September 3, 2006

Auditor-General's Report: Wave of complaints on housing

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GEORGE TOWN: Tsunami victims staying in temporary houses are fed up with the delay in the completion of their permanent accommodation.

They are also complaining that the size of the houses is smaller than what was promised. A block of apartments in Tanjung Bungah is being built for them. The residents, who are now staying in Jalan Batu Ferringhi, said they were not surprised with the Auditor-General's findings on shoddy workmanship and inefficient management of the project to build and repair houses for tsunami victims in Kedah and Penang.



The yet-to-be completed block of apartments in Tanjung Bungah.

One of them, Rahim Ahman, 28, said his family was supposed to move into their new home last month. "However, we have been informed that our house is not ready. We are in the dark when we can move in," he said. Iskandar Ibrahim, 22, said he was shocked to discover that the new houses were smaller than what had been promised.

"I saw the original plan and the rooms were much bigger compared to what has been built," said Iskandar, who is married with two daughters.

The New Straits Times yesterday reported Auditor-General Tan Sri Ambrin Buang as saying that the programme to repair or build houses for tsunami victims in Kedah and Penang had been abused.

He said projects were completed late, contracts were not signed and work was shoddy. State government officials could not be contacted to comment on the findings. In Sungai Petani, hairline cracks have appeared on the walls of several of the new bungalows built for tsunami victims in Kampung Permatang Katong in Kota Kuala Muda. Gardener Daud Ariffin, 52, said developer Syarikat Perumahan Nasional Bhd repaired the cracks before he moved in a month ago.

The developer has built 94 units for the victims who were staying in longhouses. They started moving in last June. Twenty families are still staying in the longhouses as their units will only be completed by mid- November under Phase Two of the programme.

Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mahdzir Khalid said 80 per cent of victims had moved into their homes.

He said that the residents had more complaints about the temporary houses which were highlighted by the NST in May last year. On the RM700,000 spent by the State Development Office to purchase caps, shirts and lapel pins and erect billboards in conjunction with the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister's visits to the State last year, Mahdzir declined to comment as he was only appointed Menteri Besar in December 2005.

In Kuala Terengganu, State Islam Hadhari and Welfare Committee chairman Datuk Rosol Wahid said some flood victims might not be aware that they were entitled to aid and hence did not submit any claims. The Auditor-General noted in his report that RM14.69 million allocated under the National Disaster Relief Fund to treat chronically-ill patients and flood victims in 2003 and 2004 was not spent because those entitled to it made no claims.

Rosol said that the Auditor-General's observations covered the period when the Pas Government was in power. "I don't think the aid was ever made known to the public. But now that this has come to light, we will look into the matter," he said.

The December 2004 floods affected six villages in Hulu Terengganu, Besut and Setiu, forcing the evacuation of 2,470 people. On the three computerised songket weaving machines costing RM270,000, which the Auditor-General said were never used and ended as exhibits at the Terengganu Crafts Centre, State Entrepreneur Development, Small and Medium Sized Industry and Petty Traders Committee chairman Datuk Abdul Rahin Mohd Said said these machines were also bought under the Pas administration.