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**COVER STORY**



# Dear minister, not bad at all for your first year!

Zuraida (fourth from left), Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his wife Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali during the launch of the National Community Policy in February this year.



PICTURES BY LOW YEN YING | EdgeProp.my

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**Y**ou see her in the news almost every day. Not just once but several times per day, she is quoted in articles talking about matters related to the Housing and Local Government Ministry (KPKT). It is undeniable that the Housing and Local Government Minister Zuraida Kamaruddin is one of the hardest working ministers we have today.

In a street poll of 20 people, conducted by EdgeProp.my recently, most said they were satisfied with Zuraida's performance and are looking forward to more announcements from the ministry this year.

The 20 respondents, aged between 22 to 71 years old include students/young graduates who are interested in owning a home, homeowners looking for a second property, retirees, property investors, real estate negotiators and business owners.

Of the 20 respondents, 15 said the minister has carried her role as minister well over the past year. The rest opined that it is too soon to judge, and that more time was needed to observe the impact of the policies and measures introduced thus far.

## Thumbs up for housing policies

The majority lauded Zuraida's efforts in promoting affordable housing and in encouraging homeownership for the lower income group. They also welcomed the National Home Ownership Campaign (HOC) which was rolled out in January and will continue until June.

One of the respondents, who only wanted to be identified as 'John', said the HOC has benefited many young

homebuyers, including his son who has just purchased a unit during the HOC at a 10% discount with other freebies included.

"I think KPKT has been very active ever since Zuraida took over last May. From the policies she initiated, I feel she is a sincere minister that really wants to ease the challenges in the property market, such as pushing for more affordable homes and launching the six-month house-buying campaign to clear existing stock in the market," said the 58-year old businessman.

However, 12 of the people polled said the policies and measures announced by the new minister lacked details and as such, had failed to make an impact.

"For example, I was happy when I heard that they promised to build one million affordable homes and that more financial packages for the lower income group will be initiated. They announced schemes such as DepositKu, but there are still so many details that have not been finalised about the scheme yet," said 30-year old marketing communications executive Tang Chin Huey.

## Loan rejections

Many prospective home buyers have complained about loan rejections hindering them from getting their dream home. As many as eight people polled raised this issue with six of them noting that housing prices are far beyond what they can afford right now.

A commodity trader who declined to be named said loan rejections are the main reason many young Malaysians who are in the lower M40 group are unable to own a home while 67-year old retired teacher Karishnan said affordability is the main

challenge for the B40 or M40 purchasers today and hopes KPKT can come up with some sort of mechanism to tackle the issue of rising house prices.

"She (Zuraida) also needs to work hand-in-hand with stakeholders such as Bank Negara Malaysia to achieve her goals that were pledged to the rakyat. Otherwise, she will have a very tough time and her good intentions may not be successful," he added.

## Please don't forget us

Although the minister's focus on the B40 group has won some hearts, other groups of homebuyers and property investors are also clamouring for attention.

One person said she was impressed by Zuraida's focus in helping the B40 group and first-time homebuyers but as an upgrader who is looking to move out of her apartment, she felt a bit left out by government as someone who was looking for a bigger house for her growing family.

"I am a mid-income earner and I want to look for a landed home for my family in the Petaling Jaya area which is close to my office, but houses here are too expensive for me. It would be great if upgraders could get some perks or tax incentives when buying their next property after selling their current house," said the 46-year old accountant.

Meanwhile, Woon, a 55-year-old manager who owns a home which he rents out for income was concerned about Pakatan Harapan's promise of one million houses in ten years as well as the Rent-to-Own (RTO) concept which the ministry is encouraging as it might cause an oversupply of affordable homes and worsen the

current stagnant rental market.

"I am not a speculator, I am just renting out one of the houses I bought using my hard-earned money for stable income when I retire. If the market is flooded with affordable homes and RTO homes, it will have a negative impact on property owners who rent out their units," added Woon.

Also sharing the same concern of oversupply is 60-year old trader Ben Chua.

"A healthy market needs a variety of property choices, but if current policies overemphasise first-time homebuyers, it will dampen investors' sentiment in the Malaysian property market," he said.

## Quality senior living

Interestingly, a few people polled raised the issue of a lack of attention for senior living. They were concerned about the aging population in the country and reckoned that there is a need for the government to set some basic rules and regulations to ensure senior living facilities are included in a property development or community.

"My husband and I plan to downsize to a serviced apartment but we have found that current high-rise residential developments have neglected the needs of senior residents. There are so few senior-friendly facilities and design features in current condominium and serviced apartment projects, such as pathways for wheelchair access and panic buttons.

"Also, as a senior, I don't really use the common facilities such as gym or swimming pool. Personally, I prefer green spaces and areas where I can relax and spend time with my neighbours," said a 60-year old retiree.