

Drifting in uncharted waters

Penang Port Commission risks hanging in limbo as chairman steps down

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GEORGE TOWN: A “dream mansion” in an elite neighbourhood here is in the spotlight after it was put up for lease years after being left idle, and its owner Penang Port Commission (PPC) is also under intense attention as well for another reason.

Questions were raised as to why after being idle for more than a decade, the 8,401sq m corner lot in Cantonment Road, which comes with a colonial mansion, is being offered on a 3+3-year lease.

Said to be worth at least RM13mil, the residential lease offer is expected to attract the wealthy but PPC, which owns many pieces of prime land on top of regulating one of the most profitable public infrastructure facilities in Penang, risks hanging in limbo with its chairman stepping down without any sign of a replacement.

Current chairman Datuk Tan Teik Cheng, who is also Penang MCA chairman, announced last week that he will step down as of June 30,



For rent: The colonial mansion in Cantonment Road is being offered on a 3+3-year lease.

thanking former Transport Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai for giving him a chance to serve.

However, it is learnt that no replacement has been finalised.

A source in the commission said on top of overseeing Penang Port, which saw a pre-tax profit of RM65mil out of a revenue of

RM450mil last year, PPC is the owner of many acres of prime land which has been left idle for over a decade.

But with the chairman stepping down and PPC board members who are political appointees resigning too, “the board now has no quorum to sit.”

“PPC’s day-to-day functions can be handled by the officers, but it needs the board to act on decisions,” said the source.

Tan could not be reached for comment, and it is learnt that Transport Minister Anthony Loke is abroad.

Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow said yesterday he will wait for the letter from the Transport Ministry before recommending candidates, adding that the choice is the prerogative of the ministry.

PPC general manager Mohamad Puzi Mohamad Nazir confirmed that the Cantonment Road land is offered as a residence.

He also said other plots belonging to PPC such as a large abandoned clubhouse with a field and basketball court in Anson Road were also up for lease.

Mohamad Puzi confirmed that PPC had acres of prime land in Batu Ferringhi, Butterworth and George Town, which came into its possession over the years when PPC was the port operator since 1956.

The port’s operations were privatised in 1994.

He conceded that it was difficult

to act without board members and the chairman.

Meanwhile, sources in PKR and DAP revealed that both parties have several candidates in mind. Other Pakatan component parties, however, have not submitted names.

State Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia chairman Marzuki Yahya said yesterday the matter had yet to be raised at Pakatan’s state-level meeting and called for the new chairman to be someone with experience in the maritime or shipping industry.

“It cannot be treated purely as a political appointment. The PPC chairman needs to know the shipping business to guide the port’s expansion plans,” he said.

The port’s licensee, Penang Port Sdn Bhd’s (PPSB) acting chief executive officer V. Sasedharan said the company looked forward to a “progressive chairman” in the commission.

He said among the most urgent expansion needed was increasing the length of Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal’s berth to take in larger cruise ships.