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Letter to the Editor **28 October 2026**

UM's student housing project must be properly monitored

A recent media report stated that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim would personally monitor Universiti Malaya's (UM) student residence project. The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) appreciate the Prime Minister's concern in completing the project without any delay but it is not for him to be monitoring the progress of the project as he has many pressing local and international issues to be dealt with.

Anwar's concerns about cost overruns, leakages, abandoned projects, variation orders and weak project management are legitimate. The UM project should serve as a model of clean, efficient and corruption-free development.

However, the project should be monitored by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) in collaboration with UM's management, the relevant implementing agencies and other stakeholders. All parties must be held accountable for their respective responsibilities and for ensuring the project's timely completion. As the project falls under its purview, the relevant Ministry must be answerable for any shortcomings in its oversight.

A clear work schedule, supported by a Gantt chart, should be established, with specific milestones and completion dates for each phase. Progress must be monitored regularly so that delays and deviations from the schedule can be identified early and corrective action taken promptly.

Contractors who fail to meet agreed deadlines without valid justification must be held accountable under the terms of their contracts. Where applicable, liquidated damages should be imposed for delays without valid grounds for an extension of time. If contractors are unable to deliver, the authorities should take prompt action to replace them where necessary to prevent further delays.

Equally important, stringent construction supervision and quality control must be maintained throughout the project. Cost-cutting measures must not compromise building quality, structural safety or the living conditions of students who will occupy the residences.

CAP stresses that public projects must be managed efficiently, transparently and accountably. The relevant Ministry and project managers must ensure that the project is completed on schedule, within budget and to the required standards, without requiring the Prime Minister's personal intervention. CAP also emphasises that, whether a project is publicly or privately funded, all parties must comply with the terms of the contract as a basic principle of good project management.

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