

No abuse of power in sale of Negri land, says PM

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PENANG, Tues. — There has been no abuse of power in the alienation of a choice piece of land near the Seremban golf course, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said here yesterday.

He said he had investigated the matter and found nothing scandalous in the move by the Negri Sembilan Government to sell plots of land in this area to bumiputras and a few non-bumiputras.

He said it was just an attempt to enable bumiputras to own houses in choice areas.

The Anti-Corruption Agency was reported last month to be investigating the sale of 43.6 hectares (109 acres) of choice land to 181 people including politicians and top ranking Government officials at low prices.

This followed public queries as to why the caretaker Government then should approve the sale of land in such a prestigious area at a very low price.

The Prime Minister said it should be remembered that the decision to alienate the land in question was made several years ago when the price of land was much lower.

Therefore, seen from this perspective, the price charged to those who had bought the plot was "not that cheap" he said.

The Prime Minister said if such land were not alienated to bumiputras, then they would not be able to own houses in choice localities as they could not afford to pay prevailing market prices.

"There should be no recrimination or jealousies about such moves," he added.

The Prime Minister said in line with the New Economic Policy, there must be a better and freer mix of all races in both urban and rural areas.

"We want the bumiputras to stay in town too but the problem is that they cannot afford to buy houses in such areas due to the high costs of houses in good localities."

"If we have bumiputras in the urban areas owning or staying only in low-costs housing schemes and non-bumiputras staying in choice areas then it will ultimately result in feelings of frustration and resentment," added the Prime Minister.

He said this was why some State Governments had alienated land in choice areas to bumiputra government servants who were able to buy such land. It was to create 'balance', he added.