

PM: We need more land for housing

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PENANG, Sun. — The Government is not heartless when evicting squatters but it has no choice as land is needed to meet the growing housing needs of the increasing population, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said shortage of land especially in urban areas meant that all available space must be fully utilised.

He was speaking at the ground breaking ceremony for the construction of 980 flats for police personnel at Bandar Baru Air Itam (former Thean Teik Estate.) The flats are among 10,000 residential and commercial units being developed by Perumahan Farlim (M) Sdn Bhd, a private developer.

Dr Mahathir said squatters who are displaced will have the opportunities to still earn their livelihood.

For instance in this new township, the evicted squatters who were farmers can adapt to the needs of the township by venturing into small business or hawking.

A few years ago there were protests by the 200-odd squatters which led to politicians and other pressure groups championing their cause and eventually the matter was resolved in court.

Dr Mahathir said such eviction of squatters which were for the greater interest of the people should never be politicised.

In the Bandar Baru Air Itam where the 200 over squatters were evicted some 60,000 people are expected to benefit.

He said the people should realise that the population was increasing by about 340,000 a year.

By the year 2000 the population is expected to reach 20 million.

The Prime Minister said this meant that not only have jobs to be generated but also houses were needed.

He asked residents who move in to such townships to be grateful to the Government which had to undergo a lot of problems including being unpopular

to get the projects going.

In a lighter vein, he said in some places not only were the new tenants ungrateful but immediately set up opposition branches and put up signboards.

On housing for the police, Dr Mahathir said that the Government has set aside a \$500 million allocation for this.

He said the Government also decided recently on a new policy on housing for police personnel which eliminates all red-tape.

He said previously the police housing projects had been bogged down by various problems.

However, under the new policy houses would be bought from developers or developers asked to build them specially for the police.

Present at the ceremony were Datuk Seri Paduka Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Chief Minister Dr Lim Chong Eu, MCA President Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, Education Minister Anwar Ibrahim, and other federal and State dignitaries.