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Collapse-Mahathir

GOVT. TO LOOK INTO FORMATION OF SPECIAL DISASTER RESCUE UNIT

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KUALA LUMPUR, Dec.15 (Bernama) -- The government will look into the possibility of setting up a special unit to deal with disasters, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed said today.

Speaking on his return from India at 7 pm, he said the unit could be patterned on those of the French and Japanese teams sent here to assist in search and rescue operations at the Highland Towers condominium collapse tragedy in Hulu Klang here.

French, Japanese and Singaporean disaster rescue teams were working with Malaysian rescuers at the scene where 49 people, nine of them foreigners, were trapped in the rubble of a 12-storey luxury apartment block which toppled after a landslide on Saturday.

Dr Mahathir told reporters at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport that the Cabinet Special Committee set up to deal with matters relating to the collapse would look into the matter.

He said he had been briefed on the latest developments but there was nothing to be happy about. -- more

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Collapse-Mahathir 2 Kuala Lumpur

Dr Mahathir said the government would study the need to have such a unit and it would give serious attention to the question of its formation.

Asked if he was satisfied with what had been done so far in the rescue operations, he said as far as he knew every thing that needed to be done had been done.

He thanked the public for their assistance like donating food to the rescuers and responding to the appeal for blood.

"This clearly shows the responsible attitude of Malaysians and their response to the call for a caring society. I am happy Malaysians feel a responsibility to assist," he said.

He also expressed gratitude to the countries which sent their special teams to assist in the search and rescue operations, like the Singapore team which were the first to arrive and those of the French and Japanese.

He said: "This shows that there are countries which feel they have a responsibility and desire to help." -- more

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Responding to a question, Dr Mahathir said the government would need to make a detailed study to take whatever action to ensure that a similar tragedy did not recur.

He described as "unexpected" that a landslide could cause the building to topple.

He said: "Attention is given to whether the building can stand erect or not. As such, many buildings on hill slopes use pillars which are not deep.

"They do not give attention to the possibility that the pillars can be broken by the force of a landslide of great magnitude."

Dr Mahathir, who left directly for the scene of the tragedy, spent about 30 minutes there. He was also briefed by the leaders of the rescue operation.

He told them not to use "rough methods" that could endanger the lives of survivors. -- more

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A grim-looking Dr Mahathir was told by the French team leader Major Serge Garrigues that there were survivors who had responded in kind to their knocking on a wall this afternoon.

Dr Mahathir also spoke to leaders of the Japanese and Singapore teams and thanked them for their effort.

Approached by newsmen, Dr Mahathir who looked dejected just shook his head and said: "Thank you, everybody" before leaving in his car. -- Bernama

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