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Mahathir-Land

GOVT PLANS TO ACQUIRE IDLE LAND, SAYS PM

TELUK INTAN, July 4 (Bernama) -- The government plans to acquire idle land in the country and develop it commercially, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today. (Corrected)

The Prime Minister said a study is being carried out on the matter, especially with regards to land division based on the faraid principles among the Malays.

"This (faraid way of land division) is the problem because idle land is mostly held by Malays. So we have to study this matter and see whether it's allowed by Islam," he told reporters after launching the Gerakan Desa Wawasan (Rural Vision Movement) in Felcra Seberang Perak, near here.

Dr Mahathir said the government finds it difficult to acquire idle land owned by Malays due to restrictions such as too many owners following division of the land in accordance with the faraid principles.

"If it involves one or two generations there will be many who would probably have a right to the land, and sometimes they are not bothered or don't want to agree and this makes it difficult for us to manage their land," he said.

The problem can be overcome because Islam does not encourage its followers to waste property, he said.

But he added that the views of the ulamaks must be heard before any decision is taken on the matter.

Dr Mahathir said the study also involves the possibility of the government acquiring idle land held by Malays by obtaining the agreement of just the majority of the owners if it is unable to get the approval of all of them.

The possibility of issuing shares to owners who have agreed to allow their land to be developed and of crediting the money of owners who could not be traced in an account until they are located will also be studied, he said.

"The important thing is for us to be able to develop the land as soon as possible although the owners could not be traced," he added.

Asked if Baitulmal will be given the task of acquiring Malay-held idle land if the proposal is implemented, Dr Mahathir said this has to be looked into first.

He said the proposal does not involve any amendment to the National Land Code as it is concerned more with the problem that arises as a result of land division in accordance with the faraid principles.

On the Federal Land Development Authority (Felda), the Prime Minister said the agency has stopped accepting new settlers at its land schemes for almost a year.

This is aimed at getting the people to work at such land schemes and be shareholders at the same time.

"We find that even long time settlers are hiring others to work, they don't want to work," he added.

The Prime Minister said certain quarters including state governments have questioned the move to stop accepting settlers, but added that the federal government is of the view that those seeking to be settlers are not keen to cultivate their land but just want to obtain land so that they can lease or sell it to others. -- BERNAMA

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