

BERNAMA NEWSPAPER EDITRIAL EXTRACTS  
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Development and environment are the main topic of most major Chinese dailies.

They feel that development must not be allowed to affect the country's environment and ecology.

NANYANG SIANG PAU says it must not be allowed at the expense of the majority.

Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Dr. Ting Chew Peh has directed housing developers to reserve land in their project site as storage area to temporarily plant trees so that they can be transplanted when the project is completed.

Developers are also required to replace a tree-for-a-tree cut down.

Recently Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir has directed the ministry to investigate the indiscriminate felling of trees and the levelling of a hill in Bukit Antarabangsa, Ulu Klang.

Datuk Dr. Ting says such development activities are being carried out in at least four areas in Selangor.

These have affected the hilly areas and their environment.

The paper points out that development on hill tops or slopes is not new.

What happened to the Highland Tower tragedy in 1993 and the Genting landslide in 1995?

The tragedies should be considered as a lesson, says the daily.

The Chinese daily calls for stricter enforcement of laws to ensure a more friendly environment.

Touching on the same topic, SIN CHEW JIT POH says the clearing of a hill at Bukit Antarabangsa is only the top of an iceberg.

How about the levelling of 40 hectares of land in Ulu Langat?

Bukit Antarabangsa is only a short distant from the Highland Tower site.

Has the state government or Ampang local authority forgotten the Highland Tower tragedy?

Land is a state matter.

Will any developer dares to clear a piece of state land without a nod from the state concerned?

The daily claims many hills have been rendered barren over the past 10 years because of uncontrolled development.

The authorities must take the matter seriously before it is too late, says the daily.

TAMIL NESAN touches the squatter problem in the country and the recent proposal by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir on the issue.

The paper says the state governments and the Federal government have decided to give serious attention to the squatter problem.

Selangor is one of the state that considers the matter very seriously as according to a national survey 10 per cent of the total population of the Klang Valley are squatters.

The Tamil daily notes that the present practice of resettling them in long-houses is ineffective as "the long-houses are usually lack basic facilities".

The deplorable condition of the long-houses also taints the beautiful image of the country, the daily laments.

The Prime Minister has proposed recently a scheme should be introduced where squatters are relocated in low cost houses, which they rent first and buy them later.

Under the proposed scheme, the government will have to buy these low cost units from the private housing developers and rent them out to squatter families once they are evacuated.

This move can help reduce the number of squatter population. But the government must exercise care in this matter to ensure only the deserving people get the houses because there will be some unscrupulous ones who want to benefit from such schemes.

The Housing and Local government Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh said his ministry is studying the proposal in detail.

BERITA HARIAN says the release of last year's Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) results is a great relief for parents who are of late concerned with rising social ills among the younger generation.

Students who did well can look forward for a brighter future.

They can pursue their studies at institutions of higher learning.

But what about those who did not perform well and cannot make it to such institutions?

The Malay daily expresses concern that these students may involve in social ills currently affecting the whole country.

Berita Harian calls on the authority to look into the fate of such students. It suggests the government should provide them training to obtain a decent job.

The daily says although the percentage of passes in 1996 SPM is 69.7 per cent compared to 67.1 per cent in 1995, it can still be improved upon.

The STAR says Bank Negara's restrictions on loans to be given out for the purchase of property and shares are sure to have an impact on the industry.

"They will definitely affect the number of new projects as well as the values of shares of such companies listed on the stock exchange." it says.

The English daily notes that the central bank has really little choice in the matter as everyone is concerned with the rapid development in the construction sector.

There is a genuine fear that there will be too many office blocks which may have difficulty in finding tenants in the next few years.

The construction of such property is quite noticeable and this can be confirmed by just a short drive around Kuala Lumpur and the Klang Valley. Massive buildings are sprouting up everywhere.

The Star recollects that financial institutions had encountered a similar situation in the mid 1980s when many of them were over-extended and when there was a property crash, many of them got into serious financial difficulties.

The Star notes that it was a bitter lesson and the Bank Negara and the Treasury cannot afford to let history repeat itself.

"If measures have to be introduced to prevent a similar recurrence, they will have to be taken even if it should mean a temporary dampening of the property market," the daily concludes.

NEW STRAITS TIMES welcomes the two "prudential and pre-emptive" measures by Bank Negara on credit facilities for the purchase of stocks and shares and specific categories of housing.

Both might well reign in excessive speculation in the stock market and asset inflation in the property market.

Effective today, the first measure will redefine the limit on loans bank can provide to buy stocks, shares, units in trust funds including loans to holding and investment companies.

The redefined limit for commercial banks and financial companies is 15 per cent and 30 per cent for merchant banks of total outstanding loans.

Loans for buying units of Amanah Saham Nasional, Amanah Saham Bumiputera, Amanah Saham Wawasan 2020 and the various trust funds set up by

State Governments will be exempted from this ruling.

The second move will limit credit facilities to specific property sectors and will be capped at 20 per cent of the banks' total loan portfolios and apartments costing less than RM150,000.

Loans for infrastructural and industrial buildings and factories will also not come under the purview of this measure.

The Times says the rationale for these measures is simple.

The central bank is concerned over the banking system's exposure in the broad property sector and the stock market. Statistics make this obvious.

Credit provided to the property sector stood at 28.7 per cent of all outstanding loans given by banks at the end of 1996. But the percentage increased to 29.1 at the end of February of this year.

The English daily warns that the consequence of asset inflation is serious. For one, it would destabilise the economy. This alone underscores the importance of keeping a tight rein on further increases in asset inflation.

The daily notes one factor that contributes to the increase in house prices is access to finance from the banking system. And this is the factor the central bank wants to reduce in terms of volume of funds. -- Bernama

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