

06/01/1997

Ensuring stability of buildings, houses

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SABAK BERNAM, Sun. - All local authorities have been directed to carry out immediate checks on the stability of buildings and houses located along river banks, hill slopes and mining land.

Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh in issuing the directive said if any buildings or houses were found unstable, the local authorities should order the owners to strengthen or reinforce the structures.

"In the meantime, the occupants in such buildings should be asked to move out until the safety of the buildings has been verified," he told reporters after chairing the Selangor MCA meeting today.

Ting's directive followed Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's call yesterday to State Governments to ban the construction of buildings along river banks and also resettle the residents to safer areas.

Ting said tragedies such as the one in Keningau recently and the collapse of the Highland Towers apartment block in Hulu Klang three years ago could have been averted if periodic checks had been carried out by the authorities.

"It is important that such checks are carried out on the stability of areas identified as prone to soil erosion and flash floods to prevent similar tragedies from recurring."

He also directed local councils to enforce the directive issued by the Cabinet immediately after the collapse of Highland Towers block involving projects near river banks, hill slopes and mining land.

With the directive, he said, the consultant and the proponents of a project were legally bound to submit geo-technical reports if they were putting up projects in these and others erosion prone areas.

He said local councils must also scrutinise all applications for projects in such areas to ensure that they strictly adhered to the directive to ensure the stability of the buildings.

Ting also called on the State Governments to check river banks and hill slopes in their respective States for stability.

In Penang, Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon has directed the State Drainage and Irrigation Department to identify all houses and buildings constructed along river banks in Penang.

"We will act fast to demolish houses which could pose danger to lives and properties," he told reporters after witnessing the opening of a Watersports Activity Centre by Yang Di Pertua Negeri Tun Hamdan Sheikh Tahir at Tanjung Bungah today.

He said at present, the department and other relevant authorities were relocating nearly 100 families living along the banks of the Sungai Pinang to longhouses in Lorong Kulit.

Koh said the relocation exercise was to enable the department to proceed with the flood mitigation project which included the widening and deepening of some stretches of Sungai Pinang.

In Alor Star, State Housing and Local Government Committee chairman Abdullah Hasnan Kamaruddin said the State planned to relocate squatters along the river banks in stages beginning this year, starting with those in the Kota Setar district.

"The squatters will first be relocated to 'transit houses' which would be built at an 18ha site in Mergong."

"The RM55 million project involved the construction of 1,050 houses and we have applied for Federal government aid," he said.

Abdullah Hasnan said the State was prepared to discuss and streamline regulations on the proposal to ban houses along river banks.

In Johor Baru, Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman said the Johor Government would resettle fishermen living along river banks and coastal areas.

He said this was in line with State's effort to resettle them and provide them with alternative sources of income.

He said the logical solution was to relocate the fishermen and develop the river banks and coastal strips with improved infrastructure to enable them to take up other jobs such as tourism-related businesses.

"The use of coastal areas and river banks has changed with the growth of tourism and the hospitality industry in general."

"The State is, therefore, reviewing several areas in Johor such as the Sungai Muar and the districts of Segamat and Pontian to implement this programme."

He said people living in river bank settlements in urban areas would also be relocated, for instance the residents of flood-prone Kg Ubi in Johor Baru who were recently relocated.

Ghani was speaking to reporters after opening the NST photo exhibition at a shopping complex.

He also said civil servants living in pre-war government quarters in Johor would also be moved to new buildings.

"The land on which these pre-war quarters are built belongs to the Government and we can use it for other purposes."

He said the Government was presently identifying areas with old government quarters in Johor for optimum land use.

In Malacca, Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Zin Abdul Ghani said the State would conduct a comprehensive study of settlements along river banks to prevent tragedies in the event of flash floods.

He said the State Executive Council would discuss the matter and new areas would be opened for the affected residents if resettlement was necessary.

The local authorities would be directed to submit reports on people living by the river banks in every district to enable the State to determine the number of families and the areas involved, he said.

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