

04 JAN 1997

Mahathir-Resettle

GOVT PROPOSES TO RESETTLE PEOPLE LIVING ON RIVER BANKS

KOTA KINABALU, Jan 4 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today people living in houses built on river banks may be resettled to safer areas.

He said the federal government will discuss the resettlement proposal with state governments as it would involve the question of whether land was available.

According to him, the high death toll in the Sabah rainstorm disaster was due to rain-swollen rivers sweeping away homes built on the banks.

Some of the houses were even built on the dry beds of rivers and were washed away when the storm swelled the rivers, he told a news conference here before returning to Kuala Lumpur after a short visit to inspect damage caused by tropical storm Greg in the interior town of Keningau on Dec 26.

He checked on the condition of Sungai Pampang and Kampung Liawan, two of the rivers which burst their banks during the height of the storm, and the relief centre for storm victims at the Keningau community centre.

The Prime Minister was earlier briefed on logging activities in the Keningau district by state Agriculture and Fisheries Minister Datuk Pandikar Amin Mulia who is chairman of the state cabinet committee on forestry.

Also present was Chief Minister Datuk Yong Teck Lee.

Dr Mahathir said people should not make rash criticisms relating to the disaster.

"Many feel that we should have more comprehensive weather forecast and so on but the problem is that people live on river banks. Even if we were to issue warnings (of storms), they may still come too late," he said.

He said some of the victims were told of rising flood waters in their areas during the last storm but they failed to heed the warning as they thought the flood would not reach their homes.

Dr Mahathir said he was satisfied with the search and rescue operation launched after the storm and the relief of victims.

He thanked foreign countries who contributed financial and other forms of assistance. -- BERNAMA

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