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Maintain green areas in housing estates (HL)

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GOPENG, Sat. - Dismayed with some State Governments which show no concern for the tree-planting campaign launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in March, the Housing and Local Government Ministry will write a reminder to them.

Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh said today some of them had shown such insensitivity to the campaign that they were even converting land allocated for recreational purposes into commercial areas, especially in housing estates and new villages.

He said directives to maintain green areas and gazette them for recreational purposes had been sent to the State Governments a "long time ago" but some "have chosen to ignore them".

He said what the State Governments were doing was sometimes "legally correct, but morally wrong" and that they should think long-term and consider the well-being of the people.

"Although land matters is the prerogative of the State, we are asking them to be a bit more caring and sensitive to the needs of residents," he told newsmen after launching a tree planting campaign by the Gopeng MCA division's Youth wing at Sekolah Rendah Jenis Kebangsaan (Cina) New Kopisan.

Ting, who is Gopeng MP, said if State Governments had given approvals to convert recreational land for commercial purposes, they should find alternatives for recreational activities.

State Governments, he said, should be aware of this matter as it had been discussed at National Council for Local Government meetings.

He said the Ministry had written to all State Governments on the need to maintain open space some time ago.

"I will ask my officers to write to them on this again," he said, adding that the State Governments' attitude in depriving the residents of recreational areas had caused those affected to complain to their wakil rakyat.

Under the law, projects, including housing schemes, must reserve at least 10 per cent of the total land area for recreational purposes.

Launching the National Tree-Planting campaign on March 3, Dr Mahathir had urged States and local authorities to make landscaping mandatory in all development projects.

He had also urged them to take landscaping seriously and come up with the necessary legislation.

The campaign is directed at combining present efforts to make Malaysia a "Garden Nation" and encompasses other tree-planting programmes such as the one managed by the Malaysian Nature Society.

Ting said the Government had set a target of growing three million trees by the year 2000 and the activity would involve 15 per cent of the country's 20 million population.

"We have given the States saplings to be planted based on their population together with other guidelines pertaining to planting, maintaining and fertilising," he added.

"We need the co-operation of State Governments to implement the Federal Government's policies," he said, adding that from next year onwards the States would have to submit a report every six months.

He said the State Governments should allocate land and space for the local authorities and private sector to actively participate in tree-

planting projects.

Ting said the overall response to the project was encouraging.

By the year 2020, he said, the country should have 20 million trees.

Ting especially commended Perlis which, though small, planned to plant three million trees. He said bigger States, therefore, should have no problems planting more trees.

"Idle land can also be utilised by planting trees for commercial purposes," he said.

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