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## Ministry to oversee relocation of riverine dwellings

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PETALING JAYA, Thurs. - The Housing and Local Government Ministry will ask State Governments to compile data on all riverine settlements for it to draw up guidelines to relocate the residents.

Its Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh said today State governments needed to identify the areas where such settlements existed, the number of people, houses and squatters to be affected and the costs involved in relocating them.

"With the data, the Ministry will be able to work out a strategy and guidelines for the States to embark on the relocation process," he told reporters after launching the Sau Seng Lum Chinese Buddhist temple's charity card in aid of kidney patients.

He was commenting on yesterday's Cabinet directive to State governments to relocate river bank settlements to prevent loss of lives during floods.

"Land is a State matter and many of the riverine settlements come under the jurisdiction of local authorities. Therefore, the relocation will have to be undertaken by the States.

"The Ministry will co-ordinate and monitor the process," he said.

Asked if the Ministry would give a deadline to the States to submit the data, he said they would have to start compiling it as soon as possible.

"Much damage has been done to the environment... therefore flash floods problem."

Ting said, however, that scarcity and high cost of land posed a problem to the relocation.

Therefore, discussions between the Federal and State governments were needed to find a solution, he said.

Ting said providing low-cost houses was one of the options being looked into by the Ministry.

"Looking at the options, providing low-cost houses is still the best solution."

Ting said he would discuss the matter further with the State governments.

Asked if the Cabinet directive would affect the Kuala Lumpur Linear City project which is being built along and on the Sungai Klang, Ting said the project was planned and he was sure that precautions were being taken to ensure stability and safety.

"KLLC is a planned project whereas existing houses on river banks are mostly built individually.

"After the Highland Towers incident, the Government had decided that engineers and architects engaged for development projects on ex-mining land, hill sides and along river banks must ensure the building's safety and stability.

"They have to prove this and submit a technical report to the authorities."

These precautions are to ensure safety during and after construction of the building.

The Cabinet's decision to relocate riverine settlements followed the Keningau tragedy where more than 190 people were killed when tropical storm Greg hit the district and several other parts of Sabah on Dec 26.

Acting Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Abang Abu Bakar Abang Mustapha had said yesterday the State governments would have to take the necessary action following the directive since land came under

State jurisdiction.

On Saturday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said that State governments must ensure employers prohibited their workers from building houses along river banks.

This is to avoid disasters such as in Keningau.

Dr Mahathir said the high rate of casualties, particularly in the Keningau district after the tropical storm hit Sabah, was due to the existence of residents living on both sides of rivers.

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