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Ministry probes land clearing case

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The Cabinet has instructed the Housing and Local Government Ministry to investigate a case of land clearing for development in Selangor which was spotted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad from a helicopter last week.

Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh said investigations at the moment had not revealed who the developer was but his ministry would be ready to take action against those responsible.

He said this during a Press conference held after launching the Jade San Lembah Jati homestead development project and World Pitch and Putt (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd at the Kuala Lumpur Tower here today.

Ting, however, declined to reveal the exact location of the land clearing, merely saying that it was within Selangor.

He said Dr Mahathir had noticed that all the trees in that particular area had been felled and a hill had been levelled when he flew over the area in a helicopter last week.

"The matter was brought up at the Cabinet meeting and my ministry was told to conduct an investigation," he said.

When asked what laws could be used, Ting said the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 could be used against the developer for indiscriminate felling of trees in the area.

"The Environmental Quality Act can also be used but that comes under another ministry."

Ting said existing laws and regulations, such as the Town and Country Planning Act 1976, Environmental Quality Act 1974 and the Street, Drainage and Building Act 1974, were adequate in keeping tabs on development and protect the environment.

"I understand that some of these local authorities have said they faced manpower problems which hampered their enforcement capabilities.

"However, the Government has instructed all these authorities to use their present resources to make sure that all developers comply with the rules and regulations."

On the degazetting of land marked for sports and recreation in housing estates, Ting said he had been told that almost all States had agreed to accept his advice to stop degazetting such land and convert them into commercial land.

"Since land matters are within their jurisdictions, it is their (the States') prerogative to do whatever they want when it comes to land. We can only advise them.

"As this move will be for the good of all, I am confident that all States will agree to stop degazetting such recreational land."

Earlier, Ting had also witnessed the signing of an agreement between the developer, Jade San Realty Sdn Bhd and World Pitch and Putt, which will develop Malaysia's first pitch and putt golf course at the housing project.

The new version of golf requires less space and costs less to play. It however will still involve the usual challenges of regulation golf courses such as tees, greens, bunkers and water hazards.

Also present were Jade San Realty chairman Tan Sri Azman Hashim; and managing director Datuk Seri Lim Chong; World Pitch and Putt Corporation Incorporated's Bob Hawke, who is the former Australian Prime Minister and Kuala Lumpur Datuk Bandar Tan Sri Kamaruzzaman Shariff.

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