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Only 153,000 trees after eight months into campaign (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - With four months to go the National Tree Planting Campaign, which kicked off amid much fanfare in March, has managed to meet only 20.5 per cent of its first year target.

Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh said reports on the first eight months of the campaign up to Oct 31 showed that only 153,000 trees had been planted.

This is far below the 750,000 target set for each year of the campaign's three-year duration. By the year 2000, there should be three million new trees nationwide and 20 million by 2020.

All but three States have met less than 30 per cent of their individual targets.

"Two or three" States have not filed reports at all, and Ting said this had been taken to mean that they had not planted any trees, in other words they had met zero per cent of their targets.

He, however, refused to name the States.

The three States which showed an excellent response to the campaign were Perak, Perlis and Negri Sembilan.

Perak has planted 93 per cent of the 90,000 trees targeted for the first year, Perlis 73 per cent of its 10,000 target and Negri Sembilan 66 per cent of its 30,000 target.

Most of the trees were planted by the local authorities and village development and welfare committees, or JKKK, said Ting.

The campaign, jointly organised by the Housing and Local Government Ministry and local authorities, had a grand launch in March with the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad planting the first tree.

The reports filed recently by the State Governments, local authorities and non-governmental organisations, are the first to be sent in since the launch.

"The figures are quite disappointing as they total only 20.5 per cent of the target," Ting said after opening the National Landscape Conference today.

Asked why the States had not furnished explanations for their failure to meet their targets, he said reasons had not been requested by the Ministry "at the first stage".

"This is the next move. Even if no trees were planted at all, let us know why," he said.

Deputy Minister Peter Chin and the National Landscape Department will be responsible for finding out the reasons, as well as co-ordinating any requests for assistance.

The States would be required to give their reasons "within the next few weeks" and from now on they would also have to file reports every three months.

"The State Governments and local authorities will be responsible for co-ordinating tree planting activities in areas within their jurisdiction," he said.

He said NGOs had been the slowest to respond to the campaign, perhaps because they had not been adequately mobilised. Chin has also been asked to look into this.

Ting said, however, the seemingly poor response could be due to a lack of co-ordination. He said many trees could have been planted but these efforts had not been communicated to the State Government.

"The NGOs may have planted some trees but have not reported this to the local authorities," he said, adding that this would also be looked into.

The targets set for each State are Perak (90,000), Johor and Selangor (80,000 each), Sabah and Sarawak (70,000 each), Federal Territory (65,000), Penang and Kelantan (50,000 each), Pahang (40,000), Negri Sembilan (30,000), Malacca (20,000), Perlis (10,000) and Labuan (5,000).

Earlier in his speech, Ting said the Landscape Department was formulating a National Landscape Policy aimed at creating a Garden Nation by 2005.

"To be a Garden Nation, landscaping must be a component of development."

He said the town planning concept which emphasised landscaping and greenery had been put into practice in the new cities of Putrajaya and Cyberjaya.

Thirty to 40 per cent of the cities have been designated green zones, and houses are built in groups linked by a green network.

"Landscaping is no longer a peripheral activity but a component of development incorporated into planning at an early stage."

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