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PM calls for landscaping to be made mandatory (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today launched the national tree planting campaign and urged States and local authorities to make landscaping mandatory in all development projects.

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

Dr Mahathir put the nationwide campaign in motion by planting the Hopea odorata (Merawan siput jantan) at the Medan Idaman Recreational Park, off Jalan Gombak.

The campaign was jointly organised by the Housing and Local Government Ministry and local authorities with a long-term target of three million trees by the year 2000 and 20 million trees by 2020. Similar tree-planting ceremonies were held in all the other States today.

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.

Dr Mahathir urged States and local authorities to have reserve land for landscaping purposes on roadsides.

People owning vacant land near roads and rivers should plant trees on it so that there would be a ready supply of trees.

"If the landowners, be they local authorities, State Governments or individuals or the private sector, are not interested in planting trees on their land, then they should allow others to do so with only a nominal payment for the use of the land."

Local authorities, on the other hand, should impose a fine on landowners who refused to allow trees to be planted on their land and instead allowed it to be overgrown with bushes or turned into rubbish dumps or to be occupied by squatters, he said.

Scenic beauty and pleasant surroundings were now basic needs for the Malaysian society which was becoming prosperous and sophisticated, the Prime Minister said.

Therefore, he said, a standard should be set and special conditions imposed that there should be provision for open spaces and areas for tree-planting.

Apart from housing estates, landscaping and scenic beauty should also be stressed in urban areas, tourist spots and industrial parks, Dr Mahathir said.

He said the task of greening Malaysia was not the sole responsibility of the Government but that of everyone in the country as well.

The Prime Minister urged the corporate sector and individuals to sponsor neon lighting and landscaping programmes in urban areas and kampungs.

Electricity supplying companies, including independent power producers, should sponsor neon lighting with low tariffs in collaboration with Tenaga Nasional.

Saying that the landscaping industry in developed countries had progressed rapidly, he said they had used the scenic beauty and pleasant surroundings as important components to draw investors and tourists.

"I believe with existing resources and expertise in the country we are capable of competing with developed countries in landscaping."

Dr Mahathir also emphasised the importance of maintaining the trees, including pruning, as neglect would cause them to grow haphazardly and become a hindrance to traffic.

The campaign was telecast live over Radio Televisyen Malaysia.

Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh said last month that the campaign needed about 15 per cent of the population, or three out of every 20 people, to plant a tree to meet its target.

The trees to be planted during the campaign include fast-growing trees such as the sentang (*Azadirichtha excelsa*), the kelumpang (*Sterculia foetida*) and the pulai (*Alstonia augustiloba*). Others include the merawan siput jantan (*Hopea odorata*), the janda merana (*Salix babylonica*), the simpuh (*Dillinia indica*), the jambu laut (*Eugenia grandis*), the tecoma (*Tabebuia pentaphylla*), the kayu manis (*Cinnamomum iners*) and the kasai (*Pometia pinnata*).

Although the campaign focuses on housing estates, the public is also encouraged to plant trees in areas such as public parks, river banks, near beaches and on government land along roads.

The ministry is also conducting a national publicity campaign to appeal to all agencies, including private companies, schools, the public and non-governmental organisations, to take part.

Dr Mahathir also presented saplings and certificates to representatives of local authorities and Federal Territories symbolising their commitment to the greening campaign.

Ting in his speech said an important step taken by his ministry was to publish the national landscaping guidelines and added that the greening campaign required the support and co-operation of all Malaysians.

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