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Speed up reports on settlements, says Ting

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TEMERLOH, Sat. - All State Governments have been directed to speed up their reports on riverine settlements to the Federal Riverine Relocation Committee, Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh said today.

"We hope State committees will submit their findings faster although they have not been given a time-frame to do so," he said, adding that the Ministry was also waiting for the Federal-level committee to submit a final report to it.

He was speaking to reporters after visiting Kampung Menterri.

He later had a dialogue session with the residents.

In January, Ting said State governments should complete checking the safety of settlements located along river banks as soon as possible as this would allow the authorities to start discussions to relocate settlers faster.

The formation of the State-level committees was decided at the main committee's first meeting in February, following the death of 250 residents on river banks in Keningau on Dec 26 last year when tropical storm Greg devastated the area.

Ting directed that checks be made on the safety of buildings and houses located along river banks and on hillslopes and mining land.

The State committees are headed by the respective State Secretaries, while the Federal committee is headed by the Housing and Local Government Ministry's secretary-general.

The committee comprises officials from the local authorities and the Drainage and Irrigation Department.

"States which already have committees to look into such matters need not form new ones as this will duplicate their functions and consume more time," Ting said, adding that the report was to facilitate the authorities in determining the number of riverine settlers and to check the spread of such settlements.

"If the reports on the findings are submitted faster, the Federal committee will be able to co-ordinate programmes to be implemented."

Last month, Ting said the State committees were also required to submit detailed reports to the main committee on the extent of such problem every six months.

He had said tragedies such as the one in Keningau, Sabah, and the Highland Towers collapse in Hulu Klang three years ago could have been averted if periodic checks had been carried out by the authorities.

Ting said although not all States had problems on settlements along the rivers and coastline, it was necessary to do a study as these were high-risk areas.

"As for now, we have directed all land officers to ensure there are no new settlements along the rivers or coastline.

"We have also directed the State authorities not to approve any housing projects in these areas," Ting said, adding that no development was allowed within the 20-metre reserve area on river banks.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had also called on State governments to ban the construction of buildings along river banks and resettle the residents in safer areas.

On compensation for settlers who would be relocated, Ting said this would depend on the State authorities.

However, he added, that the Government would consider their security and source of income before carrying out the relocation exercise.

On possible action against settlers who refused to move out, Ting said in cases where the land was owned by them (settlers), all the State governments could do was to advise them.

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