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Ting: Stiffer penalties not the answer

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ALOR STAR, Mon. - Stiffer laws on littering will not make the country clean and beautiful if apathy persists among Malaysians, Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh today.

Ting said despite the stiff penalties against littering, as well as cleanliness and beautification campaigns and the ministry's proposal to make litterbugs do community work, Malaysians generally lacked consciousness about cleanliness.

He said "ugly spots" were evident everywhere and would continue to exist if Malaysians did not change their attitude.

"Everyone should take seriously the Prime Minister's comment and his aspiration to make our country clean and beautiful," he said.

Yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad called for stern action against litterbugs after seeing rubbish strewn along Jalan Bukit Bintang in Kuala Lumpur.

Dr Mahathir said the people should be ashamed that while Malaysia was praised for cleanliness, there were those who continued to litter.

Ting said he agreed with the Prime Minister that stiffer penalties would not achieve the desired effect if the people did not change their bad habits.

"Various cleanliness and beautification campaigns, including the one launched by the Prime Minister himself in Perak in 1990, are proof that the Prime Minister and the Government are serious about improving the country's cleanliness.

"The local authorities and many non-governmental organisations have also organised cleanliness programmes but as we can see, the standard of cleanliness has not improved much," he said after presenting RM1.7 million in capitation grant to local authorities in Kedah.

Ting said although the current penalty for littering was high, people kept throwing rubbish indiscriminately.

"We do not have enough people. It is also impossible to station so many enforcement officers everywhere just to catch the litterbugs as it will be a waste of manpower," he added.

On the implementation of the proposed law to sentence litterbugs to do community service, Ting said it would take some time as the provisions would be included in the draft of the proposed Bill on the privatisation of disposal of refuse and solid wastes.

This would depend on how fast the new law, which was being studied by the Economic Planning Unit, the Housing and Local Government Ministry and the consortium undertaking the privatisation, was approved by the Cabinet and subsequently tabled in Parliament.

In Ipoh, State Urban Development, Local Government and Consumer Affairs Committee chairman Chang Ko Youn said the public must co-operate and make an effort not to throw rubbish indiscriminately.

Chang said there were sufficient laws on public cleanliness and penalties for littering but some of the laws could not be enforced because of the shortage of manpower.

He also said it was impossible for enforcement officers to give their full attention to the matter when they also had other things to attend to.

Chang said it was vital that the public play a role in maintaining cleanliness in the country.

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