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Ensuring 'garden nation' project becomes a reality

IPOH, Mon. - A special landscape committee under the National Landscape Department of the Housing and Local Government Ministry has been set up to ensure that the objective of the Government's "garden nation" programme is achieved.

Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh said the tree-planting project under the programme which was launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had been bogged down by certain problems including lack of co-ordination from local authorities in some cases.

The current economic problem had also affected the smooth implementation of the programme.

Speaking after attending the Chinese Chamber of Commerce cultural festival at the town hall here last night, he said the department would co-ordinate with other government agencies to implement the programme.

This follows an appeal from State Governments to help them in the programme. The committee will see to the development of landscape and planting of trees for which RM200 million had been allocated under the Seventh Malaysia Plan.

Part of the plan is to start public parks in all the State capitals and towns.

The department is also monitoring efforts of local councils and State Governments and encouraging the private sector to participate in the greening programme.

"Not all the States have achieved their target yet. The department will at the end of the year compile and assess information from all States and announce the achievements of each State," he said.

On the cutting of trees by local councils, Ting said under a provision of the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (amended 1996), trees which reached a circumference of 0.8 metre should not be cut, except when they caused a danger or were dying.

"Local authorities are also not above the law," he said.

He also advised local councils not to cut trees or trim them indiscriminately because of the La Nina phenomenon. They should consult the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia on trimming methods.

Under the new provision of the Town and Country Planning Act, cutting down a designated tree (which is identified based on several reasons including age of the tree and historical background) will make the offender liable to a fine of up to RM50,000 and will also have to replace the tree.

For other trees, the fine is up to RM5,000.

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