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States told to gazette order to preserve trees

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PETALING JAYA, Mon. - State Governments are told to gazette the order to preserve trees, introduced more than three years ago, to prevent indiscriminate cutting and felling of trees.

Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh said the Tree Preservation Order, a new provision included in the amendments to the Town and Country Planning Act in 1995, must be implemented by State Governments.

Under the Order, trees of girth exceeding 0.8 metre are to be preserved unless they are endangering public safety.

The Order, among others, prohibit the felling of such trees except with the written permission from the local planning authority.

If there is a need to remove the trees, developers will have to carry out transplantation.

Those flouting the Order can be fined a maximum of RM50,000.

"We will check which States have not gazetted it and will urge them to do so," Ting told reporters when asked how many States had actually gazetted the Order.

Earlier, he launched the 1999 National Tree-Planting Campaign, being held in conjunction with the National Landscaping Day which fell on March 3.

In 1995, the Town and Country Planning Department had amended the Town and Country Planning Act requiring developers to submit a development proposal report, including layout plans, when applying for planning permission.

The layout plans must contain measures for the protection of the physical environment, preservation of landscapes, natural topography and trees.

A new part on tree preservation was included in the Act. It was to allow the introduction of the Tree Preservation Order for local planning authorities to preserve trees.

These amendments were gazetted in 1996 but it is believed many of the States have yet to adopt the Order.

This issue is being raised in the light of current development projects being allowed in forest reserves.

One example is the Bukit Sungai Puteh Forest Reserve in Cheras where five development projects have been approved by the Selangor Government.

On the tree-planting campaign, Ting said the number of trees planted last year had far exceeded the annual target.

A total of 1,117,652 trees were planted nationwide last year although the target was 750,000.

The Government had set a target of planting three million trees by the year 2000 and 20 million by 2020 under the campaign to green the nation which was launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in March 1997.

"To date, we have already achieved about 56.4 per cent of the target for the year 2000.

"This is despite the weather problems caused by the La Nina and El Nino," said Ting.

All states, except Kelantan, Penang, Sabah and the Federal Territory, had exceeded their targets last year.

Johor had planted 269,401 trees last year although its target was

80,000, Kedah planted 99,608 but its target was 60,000, Malacca 38,390 (20,000), Negeri Sembilan 56,284 (30,000), Perak 187,376 (90,000), Pahang 43,229 (40,000), Perlis 14,122 (10,000), Sarawak 75,613 (70,000), Selangor 126,893 (80,000), Terengganu 41,713 (30,000), and Labuan 5,467 (5,000).

Kelantan managed to achieve only 72.6 per cent of its 50,000 target, Perak 82.58 per cent of its 50,000 target, Sabah 61 per cent of the 70,000 target and the Federal Territory 60 per cent of the 65,000 target.

For these four states, Ting said the National Landscape Department would get in touch with the State Secretaries to find out their problems.

Ting also said that he was disappointed with the lack of participation in the campaign from the private sector and non-governmental organisations.

"The NGOs have not been cooperating with us at all. It is difficult to ensure the success of the campaign without participation and initiative from everyone.

"The campaign will benefit the people. As such, NGOs which care for the people, should help," he said.

When suggested that this was because tree-preservation was more crucial and beneficial than tree-planting, Ting said both were equally important.

Earlier in his speech, Ting said the theme for this year's campaign "The Conservation of Landscaping Heritage" showed the need for development to be environment-friendly.

"Development activities that protect the natural characteristics and sensitivity of the area, and protect the trees and hills are important," he said.

The NLD has allocated RM3 million this year for the nationwide campaign. The department's total allocation is RM37.6 million.

Of this, RM18.9 million would be used to create and maintain 43 public parks, RM17.49 million for landscaping, RM1.9 for research and development.

The launch of this year's campaign was jointly organised by, among others, the NLD, the ministry, the Petaling Jaya Municipal Council, Housing Developers' Association (HDA) and Malaysian Nature Society's Tree Planting Group.

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