

13 AUG 1999

Trees

TREE-PLANTING DRIVE SLACKENING THIS YEAR, SAYS TING

IPOH, Aug 13 (Bernama) -- Enthusiasm for a nation-wide tree-planting drive seems to have slackened this year, setting back a plan to make Malaysia a nation of parks by 2005.

Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh said there was almost an 80 per cent shortfall in the number of trees targeted for planting so far this year.

Of the targeted 750,000 trees for planting this year, only 158,560 or 21.14 per cent had been planted.

"Only Selangor and Terengganu have planted 50 per cent of their targeted number of trees," he told reporters here today.

The other states attained a planting rate of 20 per cent and below, while two states did not report at all their tree-planting progress so far this year.

States are required to report such progress every three months to the National Landscape Department, the agency monitoring and coordinating the campaign.

In the first year since the campaign was launched in March 1997 by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, a total of 672,672 trees were planted.

He said last year's progress was more encouraging with 1,117,652 trees being planted, a 149 per cent increase over the annual target of 750,000 trees.

Ting said with the campaign losing steam this year, it would set back the objective of planting three million trees by 2000 and 20 million by 2020.

He attributed the lack of zeal possibly to loose supervision by local state governments and local authorities which were preoccupied with accelerating economic recovery measures.

On the political front, Ting said an MCA study revealed that the grassroots electorate were mainly unhappy over the general lack of public amenities.

Ting, who is also party secretary-general, said this was based on feedback compiled from monthly reports of all the 103 MCA elected representatives nation-wide.

"The party is using the feedback to get the authorities and the MCA representatives in state executive councils or the Cabinet to react promptly," he said.

In this way, the party would try to honour as many as possible the election pledges made to the grassroots electorate.

Where the pledges involved implementing major and costly projects, the party would be honest with the electorate that these projects had to be deferred because of the economic downturn.

Earlier, Ting, who is the Member of Parliament for Gopeng, presented complimentary copies of Chinese-language newspapers to the Phui Ying national type Chinese primary school in Simpang Pulai near here.

-- BERNAMA

HK RYN