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Development accent on green

DEVELOPMENT of land disturbs the ecological equilibrium of nature. The green canopy of plantations and secondary jungle metamorphose into the multi-hued roofs of housing estates and commercial complexes. Trees are replaced with concrete structures.

Fortunately, developers in the past built landed properties which enabled households to nurse their tiny green acres. Some local authorities required builders to reserve green lungs in their schemes and they greened the roads with trees. And so our townships did not become concrete jungles.

But times have changed and are changing. Land in the periphery of old towns and new cities is scarce and expensive. In many areas only hills remain. The focus of property development thus turned to high-rise buildings which in most sites perforced hills to be carved out.

These locales remain denuded of trees as were the centres of commerce and business of the capital city and other big towns in the country.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad realised this blemish in the rapid development of Kuala Lumpur when he assumed office in 1981. He urged City Hall to add greenery to all roads. A department of parks was established to implement that task. The result: Kuala Lumpur has several green lungs and many, many tree-lined roads irradiating the city, a refreshing sight to the enviable eyes of many visitors and tourists.

Unbridled development, however, was ridding other places of trees, changing the face of the environment. It is potentially hazardous too. For tree-roots cement soil. Without them nature loses one defence against the torrential rains the country is frequently lashed with.

Loose soil drain unfettered into drains and culverts, clogging them and causing floods. In hilly terrain, exposed soil run off mightly bringing down hill-slopes in landslides.

To avert these dangers and to colour development green, Dr Mahathir launched a tree-planting campaign in 1997. It set the objective of planting three million trees.

The goal has been achieved with a measure of success with about 2.38 million trees firmly on the ground all over the country. On Sunday, the Prime Minister led thousands of Malaysians to bed 100,000 plants within one minute.

The task calls for the growth of 20 million trees by 2020 and the mission envisions a garden nation.

A lofty ideal but ideals must be lofty; otherwise the inspiration might not be uplifting enough. Dr Mahathir knows that annual campaigns alone might not suffice to attain that ambition.

As he said, the public should not wait for the annual launches. Rather, people should initiate their deeds as they are ultimately responsible for the greening of their own vicinity.

The Prime Minister also took occasion on Sunday to urge developers to put the accent on greening their building projects, especially those sited on high ground and hills. The hills have been around for thousands and millions of years. Many, if not, most have strong foundations.

Builders do not have to level hills completely. Cut what is absolutely necessary but retain the contours and reinforce the slopes if dictated by the geology of the terrain. And above all endeavour to maintain as much of the trees on the site as construction permits. Greenery makes the project

more attractive, adding value to the units built. It is good business for developers to accent on green.

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