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PM: Don't level hills (HL)

Ramlan Said

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Hills should not be levelled and trees felled indiscriminately in the name of development, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Instead, he said, projects like housing should "incorporate" greenery - making them more attractive and with the units fetching a higher price.

"There is no need to level hills so that something can be built on them. It can be done if the foundation for the buildings to be constructed is strong enough and taking into account the slope of the hills," he said when launching the "New Millennium Tree Planting" campaign at Taman Bukit Jalil.

Later, joined by thousands of Malaysians in various parts of the country, Dr Mahathir participated in the campaign which entered the Malaysia Book Of Records.

The organisers have targeted for a total of 100,000 trees to be planted simultaneously within one minute throughout the country.

Dr Mahathir said if hills were not levelled, they would help preserve the existing natural landscape.

"If a hill is cleared for a project, then we have to landscape the area after it is completed. This is a waste of money."

The Prime Minister said it would be meaningless to have rapid development only to see the environment destroyed in the process.

"If we want to become a developed nation, one of the criteria that we must have is concern for the environment."

He said while many foreign tourists were impressed with the country's greenery, Malaysians often took it for granted.

"We do not value this until we go to countries and see deserts instead of trees. We have lots of trees, so we must protect them. Do not fell them so easily without any consideration for the environment."

Dr Mahathir also spoke on the need for more parks for the people especially in areas where the price of land was still low.

"Before long, they will be surrounded by development, turning them into city parks."

Later at a Press conference, Dr Mahathir said although the tree-planting campaign would be held annually, the public should not wait for it before greening their areas.

"You do not have to wait ... plant as many trees as possible, the more the better."

Asked to elaborate on his call for more parks, Dr Mahathir felt the high cost of land should not prevent local authorities from doing so as such projects could make use of existing hills and green lungs.

The Prime Minister was asked about Malaysia, despite carrying out various campaigns for the environment, still being criticised by some quarters for not doing enough.

"There is no point taking into account foreign reports about Malaysia which should be dismissed completely," he retorted.

"Even foreigners tell me they don't rely on foreign newspapers. Those interested to invest here say the situation in Malaysia is different from the reports they read.

"It is the same with tourists. They know that all these (reports) are negative propaganda."

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