

Panel to tackle squatter woes

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By IZATUN SHARI

SUNGAI BULOH: A committee headed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has been set up to tackle squatter problems in the Klang Valley.

The committee, which includes several representatives from the Selangor State Government, will later extend its efforts to other states.

"Squatter problems are a long-standing issue which seems impossible for us to resolve. While the country is fast developing with tall wonderful buildings, there are still squatter areas in the background, Dr Mahathir said yesterday.

He urged squatter colonies not to allow themselves to be instigated by the Opposition and some non-governmental organisations and give their full co-operation to the Government to settle the problem.

"It is as if the people cannot afford to own proper homes. We have studied the problem for a long time and made a lot of effort, but if there is no co-operation from the squatters, we will not be able to relocate them to a proper area like this," he said before handing

over keys to 20 purchasers of the Damansara Damai low-medium-cost apartment units here.

Dr Mahathir said squatters should highlight their plight to the Barisan Nasional state assemblymen instead of the opposition parties.

"I would like to remind the squatters not to listen to the opposition parties who have never done anything but instigate the people."

He said in a relocation process, 80% of the squatters would normally give their full co-operation while the re-

mainder who had been instigated by the opposition parties would refuse to move.

Asked whether the Government would resort to "forceful action" to relocate them, he said: "We would like to do so but the opposition parties and NGOs will come and provoke

them not to do so by promising to provide them with free legal services."

He challenged the opposition to prove that they really care for the welfare of the squatters and produce affordable homes or pay compensation instead of inciting them to get involved in demonstrations.

Dr Mahathir also said he was "deeply saddened about the long-standing problem in Kampung Baru" whose conditions he said, could be likened to a squatter area.

"Until when do they want to stay in such a place in the middle of the city.

"They want the compensation to be the same as the current land value. Then we will lose a Malay village in the city.

"If we were to build homes there, I don't think the Malays will be able to afford them as the construction cost there will be extremely high. It will probably be RM1,000 per square foot.

"They did not pay a high price when they purchased the land, so if they want to remain there, they should quote a more reasonable price," he said.