

Vacant land in KL to be fenced up

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Dr M: Move to prevent growth of new squatter colonies

By SA'ODAH ELIAS

THE Federal Government will fence up all vacant plots of land in Kuala Lumpur to check the growth of new squatter colonies. It will also build up to 35,000 units of low-cost flats over the next two years to relocate squatters currently living in slum areas in the city.

The move to fence up unoccupied government or private land would create "a sense of occupancy" so that they would not be encroached by potential squatters, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The measure was part of many programmes to be implemented by the Government to make Kuala Lumpur free of squatters and slum colonies by 2003.

He said efforts to provide better facilities for those who were willing to move to low-cost flats would also be speeded up to encourage them to leave their squatter houses.

"We are now using this soft approach to persuade them to relocate.

"The squatter problem that we have here in Kuala Lumpur now is not caused by lack of housing, but because the squatters are, too choosy about the location.

"We cannot accommodate all

their wishes because most of the time, the place favoured by them is already congested.

"There is just not enough land for low-cost flats and other facilities that they will need," he said on Tuesday.

Dr Mahathir said the Government needed the full cooperation of the media to highlight this problem so that squatters would be more willing to understand the difficulties faced by the government in relocating them to places of their choice.

In some cases, he said, the Government faced problems even when it wanted to build low-cost flats in areas where the squatters were currently staying because they refused to move elsewhere temporarily to allow projects to proceed.

On the failure of many local councils to strictly enforce regulations on squatters, Dr Mahathir said that would not happen again because the Government had given specific instructions on the matter.

The directive is in line with the theme of this year's World Habitat Day -- "Cities Without Slums" -- which falls on Oct 1.

The national-level programme will be launched by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi at the Lembah Subang People's Housing Project.

Dr Mahathir also announced the issuance of 5,000 new licences to petty traders and hawkers in the city.

The move, he said, was to encourage the growth of such activities and the first step towards ridding the city of unlicensed petty traders and hawkers.