

'Beautiful environment is just as important'

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Prime Minister: March 3 is Natural Landscape Day

By Patrick Sennyah

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — Prime Minister Datuk Dr Mahathir Mohamad said development in the country has reached a stage where initiatives have to be taken to beautify the environment in line with the country's progress.

He said apart from ensuring a better environment to live in, beautiful surroundings and landscapes would also act as attractions to various economic and social activities.

"The growth of our tourism industry also strongly depends on the natural landscape at several popular destinations here," he said after launching National Landscape Day 2001 themed "Love Our Landscapes" at Dataran Putra in Putrajaya today.

"The development of hotels and resorts with minimum damage to the environment is a challenge which local developers must take to ensure natural landscapes are maintained."

The Government, said the Prime Minister, had decided to declare March 3 as Natural Landscape Day.

He said developers should study ways to develop hilly areas and valleys without having to level the areas, and maintain the natural water flow during rains.

Dr Mahathir said the planting of trees should also be a continuous effort by everybody.

"It is the Government's hope that each Malaysian plant at least a tree in his lifetime and that the target to green the country with 20 million trees by the year 2020 is met," he said.

For the beautification of individual houses, he said those without compounds could still inject aesthetic value by having potted plants displayed outside the windows.

"I believe Malaysian architects will soon learn how residents on

the higher floors of multi-storey houses can beautify such buildings with potted flowering plants," he added.

Meanwhile, Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Ong Ka Ting said his ministry would ensure that developers do their best to maintain the natural surroundings when undertaking development projects.

"We have our guidelines and will also do our best to ensure all future development plans for housing estates, include a green lung area," he said.

He said since the first national tree planting campaign was launched on March 3, 1997, a total of 3,000,298 trees have been planted, surpassing the three million target set for last year.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir handed out pledges to the various State representatives to meet their target for another national tree planting campaign from 2001 to 2005.

Ong said his ministry had set a target of 3.5 million trees to be planted during the five-year period.

Dr Mahathir also presented prizes to the winners of the national level landscape competition 2000 and planted a *meranti siput jantan* tree to mark the launch of the 2001-2005 national tree planting campaign.

Special National Landscape Awards 2001 were presented by the Prime Minister to several public and private organisations for their outstanding contributions and commitment to maintaining the country's natural landscape.

The recipients were Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman (for the Johor State Government); Tan Sri Azizan Zainul Abidin (KLCC Holdings Berhad and Perbadanan Putrajaya); Tan Sri Kamaruzzaman Shariff (Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur); and Tan Sri Othman Rijal (Kuala Lumpur International Airport).