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Ong-Housing

GOVT HOPES TO SOLVE SQUATTER SETTLEMENT PROBLEMS IN FIVE YEARS

KUALA LUMPUR, March 29 (Bernama) -- The government hopes to solve the housing problems of squatters throughout the country in the next five years, Minister of Housing & Local Government, Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting said today.

However Ong said an estimated 230,000 low-cost houses would be built under the Eight Malaysia Plan. At present there are 100,000 squatters existing in the country.

Under the Seventh Malaysia Plan, 190,000 units were built to resettle squatters but the number was not adequate as many of the houses were allotted to low-income earners who are not squatters.

"Some of the low-cost projects are also not in strategic areas and were away from the city and this discouraged them (from taking up the units)," he told reporters after handing over certificates to 15 students who completed a two-year journalism course in the Mandarin language.

Ong also said a census conducted by the University of Science Malaysia and University Kebangsaan Malaysia last year revealed that there were 120,000 squatters in the country.

Meanwhile, the minister urged the Kuala Lumpur City Hall and the Selangor state government to give an undertaking that they would solve the woes of approximately 10,000 squatters in Selangor and about 25,000 squatters in Kuala Lumpur.

He added that the government would have to seriously focus on alleviating poverty in the city, provide more social amenities, to empower enforcement agencies to curb the mushrooming of new squatter settlements and to solve frequent flooding problems in the city under the Urbanisation Master Plan.

On the relaxation of rules for foreign investors to purchase upmarket and high-end properties in Malaysia, Ong said it was being allowed to cushion the impact of the economic slowdown in the United States.

He said his ministry was in the midst of relaxing Foreign Investment Committee rules to facilitate property acquisition by foreigners as a step to prevent an overhang in the property market.

With the onslaught of the economic slowdown in the United States, the impact of which is expected to be greater than anticipated, the property market will be the first to be hit if a recession sets in.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad announced on Wednesday a package of pre-emptive measures which is expected to pump prime the economy as United States-bound exports make up 25 per cent of the total foreign exports of the country.

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