

30/04/2001

Move to end flood woes (HL)

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PETALING JAYA, Sun. - The Town and Country Planning Act will be amended to include provisions aimed at effective flood control and to minimise environmental damage in major towns.

The amendments will see the setting up of the National Spatial Plan, a masterplan to ensure balanced development, which will be co-ordinated by the proposed National Physical Planning Council.

The council will be headed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who will be assisted by his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

"The Government has in principle decided to amend the Town and Country Planning Act soon to incorporate the plan and the council," said Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting today.

His statement comes a day after the Prime Minister blamed poor development planning and inefficient maintenance for the floods which hit the city on Thursday, leaving two dead and thousands stranded.

Ong was speaking to reporters after launching the "Save Our Community" recycling campaign.

"There is no doubt that problems such as floods are due to improper town design and planning," said Ong, adding that many development projects were not gazetted while some developers did not follow guidelines.

Besides the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, all Menteri Besar, Chief Ministers and relevant Cabinet Ministers will also be on the council.

"However, it must be clear that the National Spatial Plan and the council are not intended to jeopardise the autonomy of State Governments, but merely to pave the way for more systematic and structured development," he said.

Ong said the council would also monitor projects which affected a population of more than 10,000 people and/or a land area exceeding 400 hectares.

"Projects on hillslopes, heritage land and environmentally sensitive areas will also be scrutinised by the council," he added.

He said other proposed amendments to the Town and Country Planning Act were to ensure local authorities gazetted all local and structural development plans.

By doing this, he said, State Governments, through the State Planning and Development Committees, would be able to monitor all projects approved by local authorities.

He also advised the relevant State authorities to stop blaming each other for Thursday's incident, but instead work together to find a permanent solution to the problem.

Earlier in his speech, Ong said the ministry, along with other related agencies, was conducting a study to come up with a masterplan to overcome the shortage of landfill areas in the country.

He said among the possibilities being considered was increasing the use of incinerators and alternative waste disposal methods.

He said 62 per cent of the country's population was centred on urban areas where land was at a premium and there was an urgent need to recycle waste.

Ong also congratulated the Kiwanis Club of Metro-Kuala Lumpur for taking the initiative to set up a recycling centre at the Kiwanis Job Training

Centre in Paramount Garden here.