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PM: Unreasonable demands do not help squatters

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PETALING JAYA, Sun. - Unreasonable demands by squatters have made it difficult for the Government to relocate them, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said squatters were only willing to pay a small sum for the houses offered by the authorities.

This has made it difficult for the authorities to address squatter problems, particularly in the Klang Valley.

"How can we pay high compensation and provide cheap homes when the cost of building them is so high, even after the Government has subsidised them."

He was speaking after handing over the keys to the first 20 buyers of the Damansara Damai affordable housing scheme.

MK Land Holdings, the developer of the project, plans to build and deliver 6,112 units by July.

Also present were Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Khir Toyo, Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting and executive chairman of MK Land Tan Sri Mustapha Kamal Abu Bakar.

Dr Mahathir blamed Opposition parties and some irresponsible non-governmental organisations for instigating squatters not to accept compensation paid by the Government.

This was why, he said, there was always certain percentage of squatters who refused to be relocated as they wanted to be paid more.

"These people have got no other work. All they do is to instigate people.

"How can we pay them more when we had paid less to the others. But this is all the work of Opposition parties and irresponsible NGOs. All they want is some popularity," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he was saddened by the attitude of residents in Kampung Baru who demanded up to RM1,000 per square feet from the Government to develop the area.

"We want to develop Kampung Baru for the Malays. But if they want similar rates to that of their surroundings, we will not be able to help them," he said.

Dr Mahathir said if the authorities decide to construct buildings in the area after acquiring the land from the Malays, they would not be able to live there as the cost would be very high.

"If this happens, Kampung Baru will be lost. If they wish to come back and stay here, I am sure they will hope to buy it (the houses) at lower prices. So we have to be reasonable a bit," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government wanted to develop Kampung Baru because it did not want the Malays to live in conditions similar to squatters.

He added it would tarnish the image of the country if tourists were taken to Kampung Baru and told that this was the way the Malay community lived.

He said if the Malays wished to live in a modern Kampung Baru, the cost to develop the area has to be low to enable the Government to resell these units to them at lower prices.

In 1997, the then Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Ibrahim Saad said the Government would not make any new offer to buy land in Kampung Baru although the area is still earmarked for a government development project.

This is because there were too many hurdles in developing the area.

Ibrahim had said when the Government mooted the idea to develop Kampung Baru in 1990, the estimated cost to purchase the land was RM40 million.

However, conservative estimates to develop the land three years ago was about RM500 million.

Asked on whether the authorities would resort to forcefully evicting squatters who refused to be relocated, Dr Mahathir said it could but the Opposition parties and irresponsible NGOs would instigate the people by offering them free legal services.

He challenged the Opposition to build affordable housing for the squatters by paying them high compensation but cheap homes and not merely criticise the authorities.

"They are only good at talking and instigating people.

"If not for instigators, we would have progressed much more than now. Whenever we wish to do something (for the people), the instigators would come (and attempt to spoil it)."

Asked whether efforts were being made to address squatter problems outside the Klang Valley, Dr Mahathir said the Government would initially focus its efforts in the Klang Valley.

On whether he was satisfied with efforts by other State Governments to address its squatter problems, he said: "Some States have tried ... some have done quite a bit and some States may be short of money, so they cannot do it (yet)."

Earlier, Dr Mahathir commended MK Land, the project developer, for building affordable housing for the people.

With this, he said, those from the lower-income group would also be able to own houses which had basic amenities and infrastructure facilities found in high-cost projects.