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`Help Orang Asli development`

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PETALING JAYA, Fri. - The Government will provide adequate support to property developers keen to assist in the development of the Orang Asli community.

Referring to the Bukit Lanjan Orang Asli resettlement project developed by the Emkay Group, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad expressed hope that other developers would carry out similar projects.

The Government would provide enough allocation to ensure that the Orang Asli would enjoy the same benefits as other Malaysians.

"The Government has been sensitive to the rights and needs of the Orang Asli for a very long time," he said at the handing over of keys of bungalow and double-storey terrace houses to 147 Orang Asli families in Damansara Perdana, Bukit Lanjan.

"In some other countries, the indigenous people were hunted down and treated as less than human, and their children were taken away from them.

"Many of them also ended up in prison, where life was so hopeless that they resorted to suicide to be free."

Dr Mahathir said the Orang Asli Affairs Department (JHEOA) was set up with the purpose of safeguarding the rights and future of the community as well as improving their standard of living.

"There are those who feel that the Orang Asli community should stay in the jungle, without education and without healthcare. But this is a purely selfish opinion."

Dr Mahathir added that Orang Asli too were capable of achieving progress.

"(To) change their lifestyle is not easy, but it is not impossible either."

Tok batin (village headman) Ismael Chat, in his speech, said the Orang Asli would have to change their attitude and mind-set to survive the challenges of modern life.

"They also need to work hard to meet new responsibilities that come with this new way of living.

Under the 1996 resettlement package jointly organised by the Selangor State Government and Emkay Group, the families would each receive a single-storey bungalow, a double-storey terrace house in Damansara Damai, and a RM45,000 Amanah Saham Bumiputera account.

The Selangor State Government had approved the alienation of 256.4ha hectares of Orang Asli land in Bukit Lanjan to Saujana Triangle Sdn Bhd, a subsidiary of Emkay Group, in 1995.