

Fence up empty plots, PM tells local govts

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By SA'ODAH ELIAS
and SUSAN TAM

KUALA LUMPUR: Local governments have been directed to fence up unoccupied land or plant trees and shrubs on empty plots in their areas to prevent new squatter colonies from emerging.

In issuing this directive, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said no empty plot in major towns and cities should be left untended as they would be taken up by squatters.

"The squatter problem is a very difficult issue to tackle in this country. The moment we clear up one area, a new one will spring up elsewhere.

"Some quarters will always try to politicise our effort although what we are trying to do is for the good of everyone, including the squatters themselves," he told reporters after delivering a keynote address at the International Real Estate Federation (Fiabci) World Congress 2002.

Fiabci is an accredited agency of the United Nations and a member of the World Habitat Forum seeking to improve the quality and com-

petitiveness of the property industry through the sharing of knowledge, information and business opportunities. The six-day event is attended by heads of the property industry worldwide.

Dr Mahathir said sometimes the Government had to take action that was necessary but deemed by some as harsh against the squatters, like dismantling their homes.

"But failure to clear up squatter areas can result in serious health problems, disastrous fires, breakdown of law and order and often riots and mayhem," he pointed out.

Dr Mahathir appealed to the public to understand the need for the Government to take stern action against the squatters, saying:

"We have built houses for them in other places but of course we cannot give them away for free. It is not that they cannot afford to pay for these houses but many would rather live in such houses because they need not pay rent and there have been cases where they even rented out their squatter homes to others."

Earlier in his keynote

address, the Prime Minister expressed amazement at how squatter settlements could double in size almost overnight, adding that if the problem was not tackled speedily it could become totally unmanageable.

He said migration from the rural areas and the influx of foreign workers contributed much to the squalor of the city slums.

He said that during the Eighth Malaysia Plan, which ends in 2005, the Government was targeting the construction of 615,000 units of houses, including 303,000 units to be built by the private sector.

Meanwhile, the Petronas Twin Towers and the Sunway Lagoon Hotel Resort were the winners of two categories under the Prix d' Excellence Awards organised by Fiabci.

The Petronas Twin Towers was declared the winner of the Office/Industrial Category and the resort won the award for the Leisure category.

The winner for the residential category was Singapore while Hungary was named the specialised category winner for historical building projects.