

PM: Squatter colonies must go

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‘No other choice because they pose a threat and danger to society’

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — Squatter settlements will have to go, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today, even if eliminating them seems harsh or inhumane.

He said although the Government did not enjoy taking such action, clearing the cities and big towns of illegal squatters was necessary because such settlements posed threats and dangers to their residents and society as a whole.

Acknowledging the complexities of the squatter problem, Dr Mahathir explained that continuing to allow the construction of illegal structures would result in such settlements mushrooming beyond control.

“No one likes to see the poor or the seemingly poor ejected from their homes, no matter how shabby and squalid they may be,” he said. “But failure to clear up city squatter areas could result in serious health problems, disastrous fires, breakdown of law and order and often riots and mayhem.”

Speaking at the opening of the 53rd Fiabci World Congress at the Putra World Trade Centre here, the Prime Minister said the Government had formulated and implemented development projects for the poor in each of its five-year development plans.

He explained to members of the International Real Estate Federation attending the congress that since 1991 the Government had seen to the construction of more than a million houses, with an additional 615,000 units planned under the Eighth Malaysia Plan (2001-2005).

“This was done under the Malaysia Incorporated concept which provides for a synergy between the Government and the private sector,” Dr Mahathir said.

Present at the meeting were Fiabci World president Nestor R. Weigand, Fiabci Malaysia president Kumar Tharmalingam, Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting and his deputy Datuk M. Kayveas.

Later, speaking at a Press conference at the same function, Dr Mahathir expressed the hope that the people would understand the Government’s predicament in addressing the squatter problem.

He said that action to relocate squatters were often turned into political issues when in fact the Government was doing squatters a favour by providing them permanent houses.

“We build houses for them but they don’t want to stay.

“It is not that they cannot afford (the houses) but they would rather live in (squatter) houses because they pay no rent and sometimes they rent out their houses.”

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‘Varsity intake system to stay’

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Dr Mahathir reiterated his earlier advice to local governments to make use of unoccupied or vacant land under their jurisdiction, as such neglected areas drew people wanting to erect illegal houses or buildings.

Asked if a lack of enforcement contributed to the squatter problem, Dr Mahathir said that people often got angry when squatters were subject to law enforcement.

He said the best remedy was to prevent them from erecting anything in the first place.

On the much-debated meritocratic intake system for public universities, Dr Mahathir said the matter was discussed at the Cabinet meeting this morning, and the Government had decided to retain it for the rest of the year.

Responding to complaints that qualified students were denied en-

try to public universities, he said that special consideration would be accorded to cases with merit.

Dr Mahathir explained that when the Government decided to base the university intake on merit, it expected the number of Bumiputera students to be greatly reduced, thus creating more places for others.

“But as it turned out, it is the other way around. Of course now they say it is not fair. Well, they should have protested earlier. We will have to stick to it (meritocracy system) at least for this year,” he said.

Asked about the MIC’s contention that Indian students were the worst affected by the meritocracy system, he said students from other races were equally affected.

On the latest report by Amnesty International criticising Malaysia’s record on human rights, Dr Mahathir said it was normal for that organisation to pick on Malaysia.