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Mahathir-Advice

DR M ADVISES LOCAL GOVERNMENTS ON HOW TO PREVENT SQUATTER COLONIES

KUALA LUMPUR, May 29 (Bernama) -- Local governments should not leave any land unoccupied to prevent them from being turned into squatter areas, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said today.

"Our advice to the local governments is that they should not leave any land unoccupied," he told a media conference after opening the FIABCI World Congress 2002, here.

Dr Mahathir said that empty land should be planted with trees or plants so that "people will not occupy them".

He said that tackling the squatter problem was quite complicated as there were times that the government had to take actions which might be considered harsh such as demolishing illegal houses.

"If we don't that, there will be more squatter areas and this will create health problems besides posing a fire hazard," he said.

Hence, the prime minister hoped that the public would understand why the government had to take harsh measures in dealing with squatters.

As to the move by some parties to politicise the government's stern action against squatters, Dr Mahathir said: "Some people make political issues out of everything".

He said that what the government was trying to do was for the benefit of everyone including the squatters themselves.

The government, he said, had built houses for them in many areas but still there were those who would rather live in squatter houses.

"They would rather live in such houses because they pay no rent and they also rent out the houses," he said.

Asked when he thinks the squatter problem will be resolved for good, Dr Mahathir said: "We demolish one (area), they open up another".

As to whether the squatter problem is caused by insufficient enforcement, Dr Mahathir said that enforcement itself could lead to problems as people would get angry.

On whether he was happy with the role of the private sector in assisting the government in the construction of low-cost houses, he said that the private sector could always do better.

On another note, he said that there were existing regulations that require developers to submit early applications for strata titles.

"We already have regulations, only that they are not observed. What we need is enforcement," he said when asked to comment on strata titles which remain a big problem to buyers of units in high-rise buildings.

-- BERNAMA

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