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Affordable housing for all in Penang

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PENANG, Sun. - Penang is confident of meeting the housing needs of everyone and developing backward areas within 10 years.

Three low-cost housing projects will take off immediately on the mainland, while efforts have begun to identify "backward" areas on the island and Seberang Prai, Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Dr Hilmi Yahaya said today.

A multi-pronged development approach by the Government, relevant agencies and private sector is aimed at improving the quality of life of poor residents.

"We plan to build low-cost houses on suitable land belonging to the Penang Island Municipal Council and State Religious Islamic Council," he said after presenting prizes to participants of the Anti-Corruption Agency and Rakan Muda run (northern zone).

Dr Hilmi said about 5,000 people, including 2,000 squatters, needed to be rehoused.

He was commenting on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement in Penang yesterday that housing development in the State was unbalanced and resulted in some people living in prewar conditions.

Dr Mahathir observed that there were still many wooden houses similar to those he had seen in the 1950s.

It showed that while the State had enjoyed tremendous development, there were still those who had been left behind.

"We accept the Prime Minister's constructive feedback," Dr Hilmi said.

"A Poverty Eradication Committee headed by myself was set up last year to address this issue," he said, adding that the committee comprised several executive councillors and heads of government departments.

Areas identified for development so far include Sungai Pinang, Batu Uban and several villages in Jelutong on Penang island, Bagan, Kampung Pisang Awak, Rumah Hijau and Ujong Batu (which have squatter settlements) and Ampang Jajar on mainland Penang.

"A development project in Sungai Pinang comprising 200 units of flats for the poor along the Tanjong Tokong-Batu Ferringhi stretch will be carried out."