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Call for State Government to address island's `pre-war' settlements

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THE stretch of shabby kampung houses along Jalan Tanjung Tokong was clearly visible despite the lingering morning mist.

Interspersed with narrow and crooked lanes as well as filthy drains, which doubled up as rude sewer passages, the village is a stark contrast to the skyscrapers which adorned the George Town skyline.

This must have prompted Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to express his concerns over the imbalanced development in the housing sector in Penang.

He described the "kampung" as reminiscent of a settlement before World War II in the then Malaya.

Dr Mahathir might have come to that conclusion upon seeing the dingy wooden houses, mostly with zinc roofs and falling walls, while accompanying Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei for horse riding in Telok Bahang in the early morning of last Saturday.

What was to have been a scenic ride along Penang's famed Tanjung Tokong-Batu Ferringhi coastal route, must have been a rude shock and an eye-opener to the Prime Minister.

Pockets of similar "pre-war" settlements appeared to dot the route which has fast been transformed into a stretch of luxury hotels and condominiums.

Although the kampungs may be small, signs of neglect still feature prominently in the houses as well as on the faces of the villagers.

For lack of amenities, as in the case of the village in Tanjung Tokong, children could be seen making do with little open spaces between crammed fishermen shacks as their playground.

The VIP visitors could have also spotted the womenfolk carrying out their morning chores, including drying their clothes on makeshift clothlines.

Concerned over the patches of the "pre-war" settlements, Dr Mahathir reminded the State Government against neglecting the less fortunate groups in its development programmes.

When officiating the ground-breaking ceremony of a RM5 billion reclamation project in Tanjung Tokong later on the same day, he advised the State to carry out a more balanced development programme to ensure the poor are not left out.

He said the scenes vividly reminded him of the images of kampungs he had seen when he visited Penang in the 1950s.

Although his comments were not derogatory, the Prime Minister said the presence of the "pre-war" settlements should not persist considering the State has enjoyed tremendous development.

He also suggested that the old architecture be incorporated and preserved in future building designs to retain the State's natural historical charm.

Having been advised by the man with visions, it is perhaps high time the State Government patched up the pockets of "pre-war" settlements.