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Housing development in Penang not balanced, says Dr Mahathir

PENANG, Sat. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is concerned that housing development in the State is not balanced, resulting in some people living in pre-war conditions.

Having had a first-hand look at several places on the island this morning, he said there were still many wooden houses similar to those which he remembered seeing in the 1950s.

"I find the houses very uncomfortable. This shows that while the State has enjoyed tremendous development, there are still those who have been left behind.

"This should not happen since development programmes in many parts of the State, including on the island, have been carried out well," he said when launching a reclamation project along the coastline in Tanjung Tokong for Tanjung Pinang Development Sdn Bhd (TPD).

TPD has been granted the exclusive right to reclaim and develop 397 hectares off the Tanjung Tokong coastline, five kilometres north of George Town.

The company, which will carry out the RM5 billion mixed development project on the reclaimed land, is 70 per cent owned by Permaijana Ribu (M) Sdn Bhd, while the remaining equity is jointly held by Koperasi Gabungan Negeri Pulau Pinang and Penang Development Corporation.

Present were Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, his deputy Datuk Dr Hilmi Yahaya and TPD director Datuk Dr Nik Mohd Kamel Nik Hassan.

Dr Mahathir said he noticed the imbalance in the housing sector while driving with Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei along the Tanjung Tokong-Batu Ferringhi tourist belt.

The Sultan, who arrived yesterday, is here on a three-day working visit. Dr Mahathir and the Sultan had earlier gone horseback riding in Telok Bahang.

The Prime Minister said during the drive through the winding roads of Batu Ferringhi, he saw many tall buildings, including hotels and luxury homes.

"I have not been to this part of the island for a long time. While the area has been developed, the development programme must be balanced," he said.

He was pleased with TPD, which would provide adequate low and medium-cost housing for the people.

"This is how things work in Malaysia. The rich help the poor."

Dr Mahathir also suggested that State planners incorporate old architectural features in their development and housing programmes to make them more attractive.

On the reclamation project, he said he liked the idea of building islands for the proposed development.

"Penang island was shaped like a turtle with four legs, but reclamation work has changed its outline. I will visit this place again, not as the Prime Minister, and hope the project will be successful."