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10-12-2008:- Stop blaming govt for disaster, says Ahmad Shabery

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KUALA LUMPUR: It is not right to hold the government solely responsible for the landslide disaster at Bukit Antarabangsa which occurred last weekend, said Information Minister Datuk Ahmad Shabery Cheek yesterday.

He said it was unfair to slam the government for failing to act everytime whenever such a disaster struck.

"It is unfair to say that government did not act. We cannot put the blame on just one authority. After all, you need two to tango, but this time there are three, the government, developers and buyers," he told Bernama here.

Ahmad Shabery was commenting on the current blame game among the authorities, developers and public after the devastating landslide at the upmarket residential area which claimed four lives and destroyed 14 bungalows.

Ahmad Shabery, who is also the deputy chairman of the national disaster and relief management committee, said house buyers also needed to be critical, especially on the safety aspects, when considering to purchase property on hill slopes.

Prospective buyers should exercise their right to demand from developers that the properties were safe to live in and there would be insurance cover for natural disasters as well.

"Safety should override status and beauty. Buyers should make that clear to developers. For instance, buyers should tell developers that they are not going to buy if developers are unwilling to provide facilities for total insurance, including acts of nature," he said.

Ahmad Shabery also said that enforcement at the local authority levels should be strengthened to prevent such disasters from recurring.

On a suggestion to set up a special purpose body dedicated to regulating development on hill slopes, he said it might not be that easy to implement in view of various complexities as land was a state matter.

"It may take some time to work that out," he said when commenting on the proposal by Dr Nehemiah Lee, an authority on soil matters, who had suggested the establishment of such a body to oversee hill slope development.

Meanwhile, Ahmad Shabery also lauded the pro-active steps taken by various private sector organisations to provide relief to victims, and cited Maybank's role in giving a six-month waiver on instalment payments to customers whose homes had been damaged by the landslide.

He said such efforts would slightly ease their misery in rebuilding their lives. — Bernama

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