

Rivers are not dumps

PM: No houses, factories to be built near river banks

KUALA LUMPUR: Rivers belong to everyone and no one must be allowed to pollute or treat them as a dumping ground, said Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The Prime Minister said all authorities must ensure that no houses were built close to riverbanks and all existing factories there must be relocated.

"If we allow factories or houses to be built on riverbanks, the rivers will become dumping grounds," he said after launching the Federation of Malay Economic Bodies at the Putra World Trade Centre here yesterday.

He was asked about the outcome of his earlier visit to the Department of Environment (DOE) in Putrajaya.

Abdullah said a more comprehensive approach was needed to tackle environmental pollution in the country, particularly those affecting the rivers.

He said he was very concerned about the various environmental problems affecting the country lately, most of which were caused by human error and greed.

"Our rivers and seas are polluted. Illegal dumping of all kinds of waste is on the increase. Our hills are damaged

and our embankments are crumbling," he said.

"All these problems must be contained. Efforts must be intensified to create greater public awareness on the need to protect and preserve the environment," he added.

All environment-related laws and regulations must be implemented fully and monitored all the time, he added.

Abdullah said he had made several recommendations to the DOE on improving the implementation of environment-related laws and strengthening the Environmental Quality Act 1974 currently under review.

They, he said, included making sure that developers did not get away with not conducting the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) simply by breaking their projects into smaller parcels.

Under the law, only projects of 50ha or more are required to have an EIA.

Abdullah said he also reminded the DOE that it was a central agency and should always be alert and quick in its actions, including the approval or rejection of EIAs.

The DOE, he added, was supposed to be a facilitator and not frustrate the private sector.



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Jail term proposal for errant developers

PUTRAJAYA: Developers and consultants who misrepresent facts in an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report will in future face a mandatory jail term if convicted.

Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid said the custodial sentence would be the ministry's suggestion when its proposal to empower all consultants to undertake the EIA instead of the Department of Environment (DOE) is approved

by the Cabinet.

The DOE, he added, would then play a monitoring role and take action against those responsible for environmental damage.

He stressed that imposing fines alone was not a deterrent to big developers and consultants who could afford to pay them.

"Jail sentences will see the person responsible penalised and not the company," he said.

"If a maximum fine is

RM500,000, the person responsible will go to court and get it lowered to RM5,000 and he will smile all the way to the bank."

Azmi said the proposal was similar to the action taken against company directors and auditors as provided for under the Companies Act.

The proposal, he said, was mainly due to the many allegations against the department whenever a problematic project was said to have EIA approval. Local authorities have

also been blamed for such projects.

He was speaking to reporters after attending a briefing with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi at the ministry here yesterday.

Azmi said Abdullah had agreed in principle to amending the Environmental Quality Act 1974 and to the proposals to rectify its weaknesses.

Another proposal is for an EIA to be a requirement for all development and industrial

projects irrespective of the acreage, he said.

Apart from asking the ministry to act very strictly against wrongdoers, Azmi said the PM had also asked the ministry to check on the list of industries rejected in developed countries and which had then been set up in third world countries.

He said these rejected industries may have caused environmental hazards in their home countries, and should also not be allowed here.