

Expedite EIA approvals, State leaders urge

17 AUG 1992

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — While State Governments have started giving consideration to the recommendations of environmental impact assessments (EIAs) to curb environmental degradation through development, many feel that the process of approval of EIAs should be improved to avoid impeding the development process.

They were responding to the statement by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad recently that State Governments should not ignore EIA recommendations when carrying out projects.

He had said the Federal Government had the power to act if development projects implemented by State Governments caused environmental degradation.

In **Seremban**, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohamad Isa Abdul Samad said the State Government had always considered EIA recommendations when carrying out projects which may affect the environment.

He said the State Government had co-operated with the Department of Environment (DOE) to ensure that EIA recommendations were adhered to when embarking on development projects.

However, Isa said the department should not be too rigid when imposing conditions as it would disrupt development programmes.

In **Kuala Terengganu**, State Executive Councillor for Tourism, Culture and Environment Aziz Awang said the State would not hesitate to cancel any provisional approval given to developers who failed to meet EIA recommendations.

He said the Government was very strict in this matter as it wanted to ensure that the projects would not destroy the environment or cause pollution.

sensitive and protected areas.

He said a special committee comprising representatives from the State Government, DOE and other related agencies would be formed soon to monitor these projects.

In **Penang**, the State Government has been following EIA recommendations for more than a year.

Standing instructions to both the Penang Island and Seberang Perai municipal councils (MPPP and MPSP respectively) were also issued five months ago, directing them to adhere to the DOE's recommendations when considering approvals for smaller projects.

State Housing, Environment and Culture Committee chairman Zakaria Bakar said: "All projects to be carried out in the State, including those by the Penang Development Corporation, which require EIAs, must adhere to the recommendations in the report before being considered for approval."

In **Ipoh**, Perak Environment Committee chairman Datuk Au How Cheong said the Science, Technology and Environment Ministry would set up EIA panels in the States to assess EIAs on behalf of the ministry.

He said this would help expedite the process of approval for EIAs which took a long time because of the lack of qualified staff at the ministry level.

Au said this step had to be taken in view of the rapid industrial development as well as the large number of activities requiring EIAs.

He said in Perak alone, several projects had been delayed because the EIAs submitted had yet to be approved.

"The delay will hamper industrial growth in the

He added that the progress of all projects approved in "sensitive areas", has been monitored closely to ensure that they continue complying with EIA requirements.

In **Perlis**, Senior State Exco member Fadzil Mahmood said the State Government strictly adheres to all EIA recommendations.

Fadzil, who heads the State Environment Committee, said all applications to set up industries were scrutinised to ensure they complied with the regulations designed to conserve the environment.

However, the authorities have yet to come up with guidelines to prevent quarry and earthworks from harming the environment.

"This is the only setback, otherwise we would have been able to effectively control all forms of industries," he said.

Similarly, the **Selangor** Government has always been insisting on EIAs for big projects, its Deputy Menteri Besar Datuk Abu Sujak Mahmud said.

He said there were cases whereby the local authorities agreed in principle to certain important projects prior to the completion of the EIAs.

"However, such projects were only given final approval on the recommendations of the reports," he stressed.

Johor will take steps to ensure all development projects in the State comply strictly with EIA recommendations, State Executive Councillor Datuk Jimmy Low Boon Hong said.

He said special attention would be given to eco-tourism projects, including the Gunung Ledang Hill Resort and plans to develop holiday resorts as they involved

State, and it is practical that panels to study the EIA be set up in all the States," Au said.

In **Kota Kinabalu**, the Permanent Secretary to the State Ministry of Tourism and Environmental Development Datuk Wilfred Lingham said the State DOE should be strengthened so that EIAs could be processed faster.

"The State Government has no teeth in enforcing environmental laws and has to rely on the DOE," he said.

In **Malacca**, the State Government is seeking a better format to process EIAs so as not to hinder the progress of development projects.

State Executive Councillor in charge of Housing, Local Government and Environmental Control, Datuk Mohamad Zin Ghani, said the present format sometimes took too long to be evaluated.

"We will request the Federal Government to come up with a standard format which can be easily applied for all big projects in all States," he added.

Mohamad Zin said local councils in the State would also include DOE representatives in environmental committee meetings at district level.

"This will speed up EIA process at the lower levels," he added.

In **Kota Baru**, Deputy Menteri Besar II Rozali Isahak said the State would ensure that projects which were harmful to the surroundings would not be carried out. At the same time, Rozali also urged the DOE to be reasonable when asking for the EIA.

"There was an instance when the EIA cost \$20,000 while the cost of building a rubber wood furniture factory was only \$10,000," he added.