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Environment

SERIOUS POLLUTERS FACE JAIL, CABINET WARNS

KUALA LUMPUR, April 9 (Bernama) -- The Government will, from now on, press the Court for jail sentence, and not just fines, on chief executive officers of companies convicted of seriously damaging the environment.

Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding said today the Cabinet viewed seriously environmental damage caused by development work and would seek jail sentence as a deterrence.

"The Cabinet has directed the ministry to go for jail sentence apart from fines because it feels that fines alone are not enough as the polluters can afford to pay," he told reporters at his office here after the weekly Cabinet meeting.

Under the Environmental Quality Act (1974) (Amendment 1996), serious environmental polluters can be fined up to RM100,000 or sentenced to five years jail or both.

So far no one has been jailed for causing environmental damage.

He said the Cabinet also decided that government officers, who carelessly approved layout plans impractical for implementation, will be transferred to other units or face promotion freeze.

For example, he said, there were one or two cases in which layout plans were approved for new townships in hilly areas although their development were unsuitable as it would involve large areas and a lot of tree-cutting which could cause environmental problems such as flooding, landslide and siltation.

The Cabinet's stern warning came in the light of a discovery last month by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad of a large area in Hulu Klang made barren because it was designated for housing.

"The Cabinet also feels that the lack of enforcement officers is not a good excuse to allow environmental damage to continue because some of the damages are done just next door to the authorities' offices," Law said.

Moreover, enforcement authorities could engage the help of the military to monitor the situation, he said.

As for the Hulu Klang case, Law said his ministry would press for severe penalties against the developer.

The stop-work order issued to the developer by the Department of Environment was still in force because it has yet to come up with a mitigative plan.

Law also said that the Cabinet has approved the construction of a RM91-million ground receiving station for satellite images and data which would take two years to complete.

But he declined to disclose the location of the 40-hectare site pending its approval by the state government concerned.

Malaysia spent about RM4 million a year to obtain satellite images and data for its environmental management, research, survey and natural resources management from ground receiving stations in Bangkok and Jakarta.

This posed constraints as the two stations could control the dissemination of those information.

Law said the proposed local ground receiving station could accept information from five satellites initially - Spot (France), Radarsat (Canada), IRS-IC (India), Noah and Landsat (United States) as well as Envisat (Europe), Seastar and EOS (United States) and Adeos (Japan) at a later stage. -- Bernama

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