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Developers say they will prevent degradation

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The six developers given approval to carry out development activities at the Bukit Sungai Puteh Forest Reserve today gave an assurance that they would prevent environmental degradation at the site.

Selangor State Science, Technology and Environment Committee chairman Ch'ng Toh Eng, who visited the site this morning, said the developers had promised to co-operate with the authorities as the hilly forest reserve was environmentally sensitive.

To ensure the developers comply with the earthworks and macro-environmental impact assessment conditions, Ch'ng has directed the relevant government agencies to collectively monitor the site.

The Ampang Jaya and Kajang municipal councils, appointed as co-ordinators, are to meet with the other agencies every two weeks to discuss enforcement and carry out monitoring.

They are also to do environmental auditing to ensure the developers comply with the macro-EIA conditions.

Ch'ng issued the directive at a meeting with officials from the two municipal councils; the Selangor Department of Environment; the departments of Wildlife and National Parks, and Drainage and Irrigation; the District Forest and Land offices; and representatives from the six developers.

The meeting followed reports in the New Straits Times about the resumption of development activities in the forest reserve which is threatening an existing wildlife sanctuary and which can result in other environmental hazards such as landslips and soil erosion.

Asked if the local authorities have sufficient manpower and expertise to carry out the monitoring and auditing, Ch'ng said they would be able to do so with the help of the other agencies.

Lack of monitoring of development sites had always been a problem. There were many instances where earthworks and land-clearing activities were not monitored, resulting in serious ecological problems.

Selangor DOE director Jalaluddin Ismail, who was also at the meeting, said that co-ordination was crucial.

He said the Land Office and the local authorities should provide copies of the earthworks plans and the attached conditions to the other agencies.

Ch'ng said the development activities would go on as approval had already been given and the affected areas degazetted.

"We cannot simply say work should stop because the developers have taken bank loans and paid their (land) premiums.

"What we can do now is to ensure the developers, contractors, suppliers and the relevant government agencies work together to help develop the area and safeguard its environment."

However, he would recommend to the State Exco that only the six projects, totalling about 160ha, should be allowed in the area.

Nine other projects, totalling about 144ha initially planned for the forest reserve, should not be allowed.

Even then, there is nothing to stop future developments from taking place as the area had been degazetted.

There were cases where developers and local authorities had taken little heed to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's repeated calls for minimum tree-cutting and hill-levelling.

He had on many occasions advised developers and local authorities to retain the green lungs and had even lamented the sad state of the Kuala Lumpur landscape.

In April last year, Dr Mahathir had directed the Housing and Local Government Ministry to investigate land-clearing and hill-cutting at the Ukay Perdana housing project in Hulu Klang.

He had spotted the bare hills from a helicopter.

The case also showed that rehabilitation is much more costly than preventive measures.

The developer, Projek Ikatan Rapi Sdn Bhd, spent millions to plant 12,000 trees at the site besides having to give the State Government RM5 million as bank guarantee.

The amount did not include the loss of the natural ecosystem, the trees and biodiversity in the area, and the cost of having to clean up the rivers polluted with silt.

In Bukit Sungai Puteh's case, there are two rivers - Sungai Sering and Sungai Raya - which run through the development site.

These rivers lead to Sungai Langat which supplies water to a big part of the Klang Valley.

Asked why development was being allowed to take place on steep slopes in the forest reserve, Ch'ng said extra care would be taken for areas categorised as "high risk" in the macro-EIA.

"There are two plots considered as high risk and the macro-EIA states that these have to be maintained as green areas," he said.

As such, Ch'ng said that the developers would have to build proper silt traps to prevent silt from entering nearby rivers and streams.

Moreover, Ch'ng said the project was low-density and the macro-EIA was approved by the DOE headquarters.

He added the report was also put on display for public comment.

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