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Developing without care to environs

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Though developers have been ordered to limit environmental damage during construction, as highlighted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad last year, some continue to ignore the directive.

Dr Mahathir had complained about environmental degradation after he spotted from a helicopter a barren hill in Hulu Kelang which had been cleared of its forest cover and flattened for the Ukay Perdana housing project.

Another project which seems to be causing similar damage is this one (picture), not far upstream from the water intake point of the Cheras Batu 11 treatment plant.

The Sungai Langat which borders some parts of the development, is a source of raw water for the plant.

This means that whatever gets into the river, is washed down to the plant.

Geologist Professor Ibrahim Komoo of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia says that water treatment plants can be situated anywhere, irrespective of the development carried out in its surroundings.

"This is because the plants function very much like factories. They treat and clean the water, including the accompanying silt."

He cautions, however, that most are not equipped to treat chemical pollution.

"The real danger lies when waterways are polluted by chemicals."

Chemical pollution becomes a possibility through development works which may involve spillage of oil from heavy machinery used, he said.

Checks at the site last Thursday and Friday, found that work was in progress on the cleared land, with excavators and tipper lorries engaged in earth works.

Also seen were a row of partially-built houses. Strangely though, no signboard indicating the project could be found.

A surveyor at the site, however, said the project was the proposed Bandar Mahkota Cheras township.

Further checks revealed that the project comprises an integrated development of residential, commercial and industrial lots on more than 3,200 hectares. The land belongs to the project developer Narajaya Sdn Bhd, of the Lion Group.

The Department of Environment, which a few months ago expressed concern over pollution of the Sungai Langat, seems oblivious to this development.

However, a spokesman for Narajaya, when contacted, said it had taken the precautions necessary to safeguard the environment, as required by the DOE.

He said silt traps had been laid, while turfing which involves the planting of grass, had been carried out on slopes.

The Cheras plant which produces about 28 million litres of treated water per day, provides water to some 100,000 households in Cheras, Balakong and Kajang.

On March 19 this year, it was reported in the New Straits Times that 20 illegal factories located along the Sungai Langat had been demolished by the Selangor Government after repeated incidents of pollution had caused the shutdown of water treatment plants.

In the same story, Menteri Besar Datuk Abu Hassan was reported to have

announced the relocation of all 169 factories situated along the Langat and Semenyih rivers, to more suitable sites, as part of the State's long-term plan.

The most recent shutdown of the Cheras plant occurred last Thursday, for two hours each, due to diesel contamination.

The source of the pollution could not be determined by Puncak Niaga (M) Sdn Bhd, the operator of the plant.

During these days of water shortage, pollution of the waterways would only aggravate the situation.

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