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`Malaysia must do more to enhance environ awareness'

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MALAYSIA has to do more on environmental issues, despite its achievement in constructing well-designed and high-technology highways and the development of its property industry, a consultant said.

Although there has been increasing awareness on the importance to preserve the environment, some property developers are making only "token" efforts towards conservation purposes.

To some, planting trees in their project is just to fulfil the local authority's requirement to have a "green lung" in the housing estate.

"Of course, this is still accepted, but how many of them really think that it is a necessary thing to do?" UK-based Scott Wilson Consulting Goup director Andrew McNab said.

He said that landslides, slope erosion and flash floods that have been occurring in the country in the past few years all resulted from the same cause - lack of environmental awareness.

Although the lack of awareness is not as bad as in the recent years, he said, special focus should be placed on the issue, especially by those involved in development-related activities.

"In recent years, there has been a growing realisation that it is impossible to separate economic development from environmental and social issues," McNab said.

"This is because in the past most countries, especially the underdeveloped or developing ones, were busy working towards achieving developed status.

"It was only recently that environmental issues became important and efforts were taken by many countries to preserve nature. These countries, in fact, have moved one step ahead by engaging consultants before proceeding with any development project," he said.

Citing Malaysia as an example, he said that in the Eighth Malaysia Plan (2001-2005) tabled by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad last month, the Government has focused on better conservation and management of the environment and natural resources, and to achieve sustainable development.

Malaysian companies, meanwhile, have started to accept the idea of engaging consultants to advise them on their development projects.

Scott Wilson, for instance, has been involved in a number of prestigious projects such as Kuala Lumpur Sentral, and the Express Rail Link from Kuala Lumpur to the KL International Airport in Sepang.

McNab said Scott Wilson offers a wide range of consultancy services, including transport planning, transport infrastructure such as highways, airports, railways and ports, industrial development and urban infrastructure.

In transport planning, McNab said, the company was appointed to provide advice on traffic control for the Sepang F1 Racing Circuit, the Shah Alam public transport system masterplan, and the Sprint highway traffic and engineering audit.

Scott Wilson also offers pavement evaluation services. The company introduced pavement rehabilitation using recycled cement-bound readbase for the North-South Expressway project. In addition, the company was responsible for pavement investigation at Damansara-Puchong Highway.

The company also provided advice for the Penchala Tunnel, Malaysia's first dual three-lane tunnel project in the Klang Valley.

Asked whether Scott Wilson plans to tie up with local universities to provide skills training to Malaysians on specific project consultation, McNab said they are interested in such ventures but the company has not been approached to date.

"If possible, we would like to stress the importance of the environmental sector, a main concern in any property, highways, airport or port development project now," he added.

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