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Nature Society, WWF back jail proposal

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - While welcoming the proposal to jail those who clear land and cut hillslopes illegally, the Malaysian Nature Society has also suggested actions the Government could take to protect the highlands.

These include a five-year moratorium on all highland development and the gradual phasing-out of short-term agricultural projects in hilly areas.

Responding to the jailing proposal by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, MNS executive officer Andrew Sebastian called on the Government to "make examples" of the offenders.

"We fully agree with a jail sentence as fines and compounds don't achieve much. The necessary amendments should be made to laws," he said.

Sebastian said the one-year study by the Cabinet Committee on Highland and Island Development was too short to accurately determine the effects of human activity on wildlife and highland ecosystems.

"You need more than a year to observe the migration of birds, or the life-cycles of flora and fauna.

"Only then can the authorities come up with guidelines that really contribute towards the preservation of the highlands," he said.

World Wide Fund for Nature Malaysia executive director Datuk Dr Mikhail Kavanagh Abdullah also supported stiffer penalties for illegal landclearers.

"We are delighted with the Prime Minister's suggestion. At the same time, the punishment should fit the crime and the authorities should decide what is fitting. Stiffer penalties will indeed make enforcement stronger."