

Jail term proposal for errant developers

PUTRAJAYA: Developers and consultants who misrepresent facts in an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report will in future face a mandatory jail term if convicted.

Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid said the custodial sentence would be the ministry's suggestion when its proposal to empower all consultants to undertake the EIA instead of the Department of Environment (DOE) is approved

by the Cabinet.

The DOE, he added, would then play a monitoring role and take action against those responsible for environmental damage.

He stressed that imposing fines alone was not a deterrent to big developers and consultants who could afford to pay them.

"Jail sentences will see the person responsible penalised and not the company," he said.

"If a maximum fine is

RM500,000, the person responsible will go to court and get it lowered to RM5,000 and he will smile all the way to the bank."

Azmi said the proposal was similar to the action taken against company directors and auditors as provided for under the Companies Act.

The proposal, he said, was mainly due to the many allegations against the department whenever a problematic project was said to have EIA approval. Local authorities have

also been blamed for such projects.

He was speaking to reporters after attending a briefing with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi at the ministry here yesterday.

Azmi said Abdullah had agreed in principle to amending the Environmental Quality Act 1974 and to the proposals to rectify its weaknesses.

Another proposal is for an EIA to be a requirement for all development and industrial

projects irrespective of the acreage, he said.

Apart from asking the ministry to act very strictly against wrongdoers, Azmi said the PM had also asked the ministry to check on the list of industries rejected in developed countries and which had then been set up in third world countries.

He said these rejected industries may have caused environmental hazards in their home countries, and should also not be allowed here.