

London sports centre plan



The TARRC building in Brickendonbury. — Bernama picture

KUALA LUMPUR: The Youth and Sports Ministry will continue pursuing the building of the controversial sports centre outside London despite strong objections from many quarters, including the opposition parties.

According to Bernama, its minister, Datuk Azalina Othman Said, said the centre was needed to mould Malaysian sportsmen to become high achievers.

She slammed detractors of the project, saying their criticisms were baseless, especially with regard to the cost of the project.

"I don't see why this project has become an issue because the cost, which was raised by Opposition leader Lim Kit Siang, has yet to be finalised."

Media reports that the centre would cost RM490 million triggered an outcry from many quarters, including opposition parties who claimed that the money could be put to better use in Malaysia.

Azalina, however, said the Finance Ministry had the last say on the matter as it was a government project.

The proposed centre is to be located at the Tun Abdul Razak Rubber Research Centre (TARRC) in Brickendonbury in Hertfordshire, some 24km from the approved site of the 2012 London Olympic Games village.



However, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi last Wednesday had said that the British authorities would not allow additional buildings to be built at the TARRC because it had been gazetted as a

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heritage site. In view of this, Azalina said the National Sports Council would meet the Malaysian Rubber Board next week to discuss the possibility of sharing the TARRC facility.

The outcome of the meeting would

be presented to the Cabinet Committee on Sports at its next meeting in September for further consideration, Azalina added.

Meanwhile, Shahrman Johari reports from London that local council officials have not received any request to build a sports framing centre for Malaysian athletes in Brickendonbury.

"We haven't received an application," Lorraine Kirk, a senior communications officer for the East Herts Council, told the *New Straits Times*..

"Any planning application will be dealt in line with Current legislation and planning procedure," said East Herts Council's leader, Tony Jackson.

The rules for constructing buildings in the United Kingdom are tough. It is more so when the area is located in a green belt, a ring of countryside protected by law from urbanisation.

TARRC is in a green belt and has buildings classified as heritage buildings. This means any external work to the buildings will not be allowed.

The plan to turn the centre into a sports hub was approved by the Cabinet Committee for Sports Development, whose members include 15 Cabinet ministers and is chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.