

Penang to decide on hillside development moratorium tomorrow

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Following the landslide at Tanjung Bungah last week, the Penang executive council are set to deliberate a moratorium on hillslope development, according to state exco Chow Kon Yeow.

“Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng will address the matter in the state exco council which meets tomorrow,” he said.

Chow was responding to a question from the press on whether the Penang government would put a stop to hillside development following the Tanjung Bungah incident, which killed at least 11.

He also responded to criticisms that the local council should not have greenlit the 50-storey project where the landslide occurred, due to its planning permission applications being **rejected** by the Department of Environment (DOE).

At a press conference in Komtar, Chow explained that the Penang Island City Council (MBPP) has full authority to control and approve development projects under its administration.

He added that MBPP came to its decision after consulting the views of all federal and state agencies related to the development.

“Only DOE did not support the development as it did not comply with the buffer zone stated under the Guidelines for Sitting and Zoning Industry and Residential Areas,” said Chow.

“However, DOE does not have the authority to decide on applications for planning permission submitted by developers. The authority lies in the MBPP,” he added.

Yesterday, MBPP mayor Maimunah Sharif (*centre in photo*) said the 980 affordable housing units were **approved** by the council’s One-stop Centre, as it complied with the state's Safety Guidelines for Hill Site Development 2012.

Chow reiterated that in Dec 2014, the Minerals and Geoscience Department (DMG) for Kedah, Perlis and Penang stated that it had no objections to the project, as long as it complied with the necessary technical conditions.

Both the DMG and DOE fall under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, he noted.

"The project area is situated some 714 meters from the blasting point of a quarry which has been operating there since 1960. The distance is further than the required 500 meters," Chow said.

"This project fulfilled the requirements of the 1996 local council's planning and development policy. It is also situated on a plot that is below 76m (or 250 ft) and categorised under category II (public housing) with a slope ratio of 20 degrees, which is the limit allowed for development," Chow explained.

"MBPP approved the project after obtaining feedback from other related agencies.

"Clearly, this is not a hillslope development as alleged by [Penang Forum](#) and other [state opposition](#) parties," he added.

No dialogue with NGOs

Chow also said the local council had in the past rejected applications approved by other departments.

"This is because MBPP decides after reviewing the projects and departments' feedback on the whole.

"There are cases where projects do not meet the proper guidelines but obtain DOE approval," he claimed.

DOE had also approved two other nearby projects, namely the Tunku Abdul Rahman College and a residential home development project.

Asked if the state leaders would attend a dialogue with NGOs over the landslide issue, Chow said, "Let's focus on getting all the facts right first as there is still a lot of misinformation and allegations based on false information."

“It is our responsibility to clarify and share the proper information. Even if you want to comment or analyse the situation, let it be based on the right source.”

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng said the state would comply with guidelines whenever required to do so.

“In this case, there was no requirement for an environmental impact study. If there were, we would have complied with it, whatever the recommendations, yes or no...or else it would just remain as recommendations (by DOE),” he said.

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