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DOE to have the final say

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SHAH ALAM: The Selangor Department of Environment (DOE) has been given the final say on future development in environmentally-sensitive areas, Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Khir Toyo said.

He said if the DOE advised against the development of a particular area, the place would be off limits.

"If the DOE advises that a particular area cannot be developed, the applicant need not even start work on an EIA," he told reporters after the state executive council meeting here yesterday.

Asked if this move would give the DOE enormous power, Dr Khir said it had the experts whose decisions would be for

the best.

As for the possibility of politicians or developers appealing against a "no-go" decision by the DOE, Dr Khir said the state had set up a committee to oversee development in environmentally-sensitive areas.

"The committee has 12 members including the various department heads. The state secretary heads it. The decision is based on expert opinion without the intervention of politicians or other interested parties," he said.

Dr Khir said the Malaysian Public Works Institute (Ikram) would be the state government's "enforcement arm."

"Basically, this means local authorities will act on information provided by Ikram," he said.

He said if Ikram's monitoring showed that developers or contractors had been negligent or shoddy in their work, it would inform the local authorities, which would then mete out the necessary punishment.

When contacted, state Environment Committee chairman Datuk Ch'ng Toh Eng said the move showed that environment protection was getting more serious attention.

"Some errant contractors take EIA approvals as a licence to start development and do not carry out the remedial measures stated in the EIA," said Ch'ng.

Selangor DOE director Che Asmah Ibrahim said if an area was extremely sensitive environmentally, there was no point even conducting an EIA.