

# Experts, NGOs call for greater oversight

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Experts and environmentalists are concerned by the consequences to the coastal environment and the community caused by land reclamation projects along the Straits of Johor.

Universiti Putra Malaysia's Faculty of Environmental Studies lecturer Dr Mohd Yusoff Ishak said coastal reclamation projects would have an adverse environmental impact, particularly with soil dumping.

Yusoff said once soil is dumped onto beaches, mangroves would be affected, especially during high and low tide.

"Mangroves are breeding grounds for fish, and without it many coastal fishing areas and habitats would deteriorate, affecting fishermen.

"In a mangrove ecosystem, some

flora and fauna require water, while others require air. When this pattern is altered, the ecosystem of both groups are disrupted.

"Soil dumping means sunlight cannot penetrate into the sea, which will affect seagrass and aquatic plants growing near shallow areas," said Yusoff.

The Johor government is preparing information about the state's coastal land reclamation for property development at the request of the Federal Government following a request by Singapore.

The project is located off Tanjung Kupang, in southwestern Johor near the second link bridge to Singapore.

Yusoff said a previous reclamation project by Singapore had affected the movement of Royal Malaysian

Navy vessels at the Tanjung Pengeh base near Pengerang and also affected the local community and environment.

He has also urged authorities look into the latest reclamation work at Pulau Merambong and Sungai Pulai, which is near the project site, as both areas are breeding grounds for seahorses.

"These areas, which are within the vicinity of the Port of Tanjung Pelepas, are known to be breeding grounds for seahorses and dugong. When looking at the proximity of the projects, it raises real concerns over the preservation of these animals."

"With the scale and nature of these projects, it would be best if stakeholders carried out a special assessment to discern its effect on

coastal communities."

He said local groups have also been working to create awareness on seagrass, seahorses and tidal flats in the area.

Environmental Protection Society Malaysia president Nithi Nesadurai concurred, saying that mangroves would be most affected by the project.

"When mangroves are disturbed, you are directly affecting nature and the people who rely on the mangroves."

Nithi said there was a possibility that soil dumping would also impede the movement of vessels.

"Vessels will not be able to move freely because of the shallow seabed."

He urged stakeholders to carry out

an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the projects, despite the fact that reclamation of parcels of land were less than 50ha each, and do not require EIAs.

He said an EIA would be able to assess the risks, remedial measures and effects on coastal areas.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia geologist Prof Dr Abd Ghani Rafek questioned if the project developer had conducted a Detailed Environmental Impact Assessment, as it was a requirement under the Department of Environment for any coastal projects.

"Construction will have an impact on the movement of vessels in the vicinity. Transportation of construction material also needs specific corridors at sea and on land."