

Sacrificing the environment

I TEACH environmental engineering at UCSI university. In the 1980s, I lectured final-year civil engineering students on the same subject at the University of Malaya as a part-time lecturer. This time the students are second-year undergraduates in chemical, petroleum and electrical engineering.

On my first lecture I told the students not to study merely to pass the examination. Instead they should aim to acquire the knowledge and learn the skills associated with this important subject. The reasons why knowledge in the subject is very much sought after are obvious.

In the current era of growing environmental consciousness, all businesses and governments worldwide treat the environment as a strategic part of their operations. Public approval of them depends heavily on how they are seen dealing with issues protecting the environment.

There is no denying that public acceptance is a major KPI for both governments and businesses. Governments want the public to continue voting for them to remain in power, while businesses want the public to continue patronising their products and services to survive.



es to survive. Therefore, graduates who demonstrate better knowledge about environmental planning and management will have an edge over others. It will put them in good stead when pursuing their career wherever they serve.

With the growing world concern over climate change and resource depletion, the subject of the environment has assumed great importance. In many developed economies, political groups which champion the environment,

the so-called green party, have grown popular among the electorate. Some have even won and formed governments, either on their own or in partnership with other parties.

At home, we do have one green party but whether they put the environment at the top of their agenda is debatable.

Rightfully, they should because Islam strongly advocates taking good care of the environment as one of the principal callings. In Islam, humankind has also been

tasked to be the custodian of the environment and the entire natural ecosystem.

Unfortunately, the case of bauxite mining in Pahang does not reflect well on that Islamic calling. It is also unfortunate that the majority of the oil palm farmers who had surrendered their land, felling their oil palm in favour of bauxite, are mostly Muslims.

It may be because of the current palm oil prices that they have been forced to take that option. Still there is no excuse to flout the rules of responsible mining.

The truth is, bauxite, which is the mineral that generates much of the aluminium that is in big demand in the world, has been mined before in the country. Those who studied geography would know that bauxite was already mined in Johor in the past.

It has stopped because the amount of deposits left does not make economic sense to mine any more. But the mining then followed proper mining procedures and therefore did not incite much complaints from the public.

Sadly, the bauxite mining in Pahang is a big contrast. Not only the excavation itself does not adhere to proper procedures, but

also the transport of the raw earth to the port also flouts all forms of reasonable guidelines. No wonder it has left behind a trail of environmental pollution that has created so much controversy and public displeasure. It has become a true red alert for the state.

The air is polluted with bauxite dust. The sea is contaminated with bauxite which may consequently pose problems for marine life and the fish that have been a source of food for people living in the area. The water source for the area may have also been contaminated.

The Health Ministry has warned about the presence of high levels of aluminium in the water system. And aluminium we are told can be a precursor for such health complications as the dreaded Alzheimer's disease.

Another matter which is baffling is, why are we exporting the low-value raw bauxite earth? We have talked much about adding value to our natural resources. Why are we not doing any processing here?

PROF DATUK DR AHMAD IBRAHIM
Fellow Academy of Sciences
Malaysia
UCSI University