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TAJUK ARTIKEL	PENANG TELCO TOWER PROTEST SMACKS OF IGNORANCE
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RADIATION

Penang telco tower protest smacks of ignorance

THE need for speed in telecommunications has necessitated the installation of infrastructure, including telecommunications (telco) towers.

The perception that telco towers can endanger lives has caused alarm.

Hence, an objective review is timely.

The authorities — including the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), city councils, Malaysian Technical Standards Forum Bhd, Malaysian Nuclear Agency and the Health Ministry — implement policies and make decisions in compliance with guidelines laid down by the World Health Organisation and the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection and other regulatory bodies.

Unbeknown to anti-telco tower quarters, the Penang City Council launched a legislation exercise in 2017 and took action against 137 illegally-built towers.

In Penang, telco providers must obtain the green light from technical agencies, such as MCMC, Tenaga Nasional Berhad, the Civil Aviation Department and the Fire and Rescue Department.

It goes beyond logic that the government would give the green light for telco towers if indeed strict regulations and monitoring had not been put into place.

The technical standards and infrastructure requirements for Radio Communications Network Infrastructure are set out in a 76-page blueprint for standards and compliances.

The American Cancer Society has debunked the myth that those living, working, or going to school near a cellphone tower might increase their risk of cancer or other health problems.

They say there is little evidence to support this idea and have postulated rational reasons.

We must recognise that the energy level of radio frequency (RF) waves is relatively low, especially when compared with the types of radiation that are known to increase cancer risk, such as gamma rays, x-rays, and ultraviolet (UV) light.

The energy of RF waves given off by cellphone towers is not enough to break chemical bonds in DNA molecules, which is how these stronger forms of radiation may cause cancer.

As RF waves have long wavelengths, "which can only be concentrated to about an inch or two in size", the energy from RF waves is unlikely to be concentrated enough to affect cells in the body.

The American Cancer Association said that "even if RF waves were somehow able to affect cells in the body at higher doses, the level of RF waves present at ground level is very low, well

below the recommended limits".

Levels of energy from RF waves near cellphone towers are not significantly different from the background levels of RF radiation in urban areas from other sources, such as radio and television broadcast stations, emphasising that "most scientists agree that cellphone antennas or towers are unlikely to cause cancer".

In a recent protest by 20 residents in Penang, attempts to correlate the sightings of dead pigeons and the decrease in the sightings of squirrels and monkeys with the installation of a telco tower at Pearl Hill smack of ignorance as there are other socio-ecological factors that could account for those trends.

Telco towers exist in countries and areas that are connected. If, indeed, it is hazardous to our health, developed nations would be the first to note and to take action.

Mankind is moving towards 5G technology with the caveat that authorities follow requirements and monitoring, and that is exactly what our authorities are doing so we can surf.

It is time to put to rest tall tales about the dangers of telco towers.

G.H. KHOO
Penang



A telecommunications tower in George Town. The perception that telco towers endanger lives has caused alarm. FILE PIC

DISEDIAKAN OLEH	1-NASAAI BIN MASNGUT (N41), BPM 2-RAJA MUSFARIZAL BINTI RAJA MUHAMAD (S19), BPM UNIT PERKHIDMATAN MAKLUMAT, BPM
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