Govt needs to get tough on polluters, too

KUALA LUMPUR: There were social media postings and subsequent news reports last month about consumers expressing shock and anger over a sudden spike in their electricity bills. Some claimed that their bills had doubled or even tripled despite similar electric usage to the previous month.

Responding to this, Energy, Science, Technology, Environment and Climate Change Minister Yeo Bee Yin pinpointed the problem: mainly technical irregularities in Tenaga Nasional Bhd’s (TNB) billing system.

Yeo also said TNB would be fined for violating the Energy Commission’s service standards, although the utility company had rectified the problem.

While the minister’s firmness in ensuring that consumers get good services at affordable fees should be commended, many are also hoping that a similar stance will also be shown against the perpetrators of environmental pollution.

There must be as concerned about pollution as she has been about high energy bills. An industry observer told the New Straits Times that “we may be seeing the repeat of Sengkang Kim Kim incident in Pasir Gudang. School following the recent case of people falling ill and hundreds of schools being closed due to toxic fumes”.

In early March, about 6,000 Pasir Gudang residents were affected by toxic fumes caused by the illegal dumping of chemical substances into Sungai Kim Kim. Three people were charged at the Sessions Court under Section 34B(1)(g) of the Environmental Quality Act 1974, which carries a maximum of five years of jail and a fine of not more than RM500,000 upon conviction. Yet, the penalty seems light.

A sterner action is also needed against those who are helping certain countries in making Malaysia the dumping ground for their plastic waste.

In May, it was revealed that 14 countries were dumping their plastic waste in Malaysia. Thus, stiffer penalty must be meted out to those who pollute the environment, since the people’s lives and the environment are at stake.

On TNB’s high electricity bills, industry observers said it would be better to let the commission conclude its investigation. TNB has given its commitment to resolving the issue by fully cooperating with the commission.

No parties should jump the gun. They should wait until the EC completes the investigation.

TNB has said it is looking at all aspects to find the causes of the unusually high bills for some of its customers, and has admitted that a technical disruption in its billing system could be one of them.

So far, the national utility company has resolved 38,000 out of 45,000 complaints received, and refunded about 1,400 customers.