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SUNDAY
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The ravaging goes on

EXCLUSIVE

The destruction of Cameron Highlands continues, with some 40ha of virgin forest chopped down in the latest spate of land clearing which began less than a month ago. The bulk of the ravaging at Pos Terisu spans at least four valleys and hills which are being flattened for farmers to plant vegetables. > see Pages 3 and 4 for reports by ISABELLE LAI



No longer pristine: Clockwise - Gunung Perdah, a popular hiking area in Tanah Rata, is now a shell of its former glory, the Ulu Telom river muddied by massive soil erosion due to unsustainable clearing methods and major earthworks going on opposite Gunung Perdah. — NORAFIFI EHSAN/The Star

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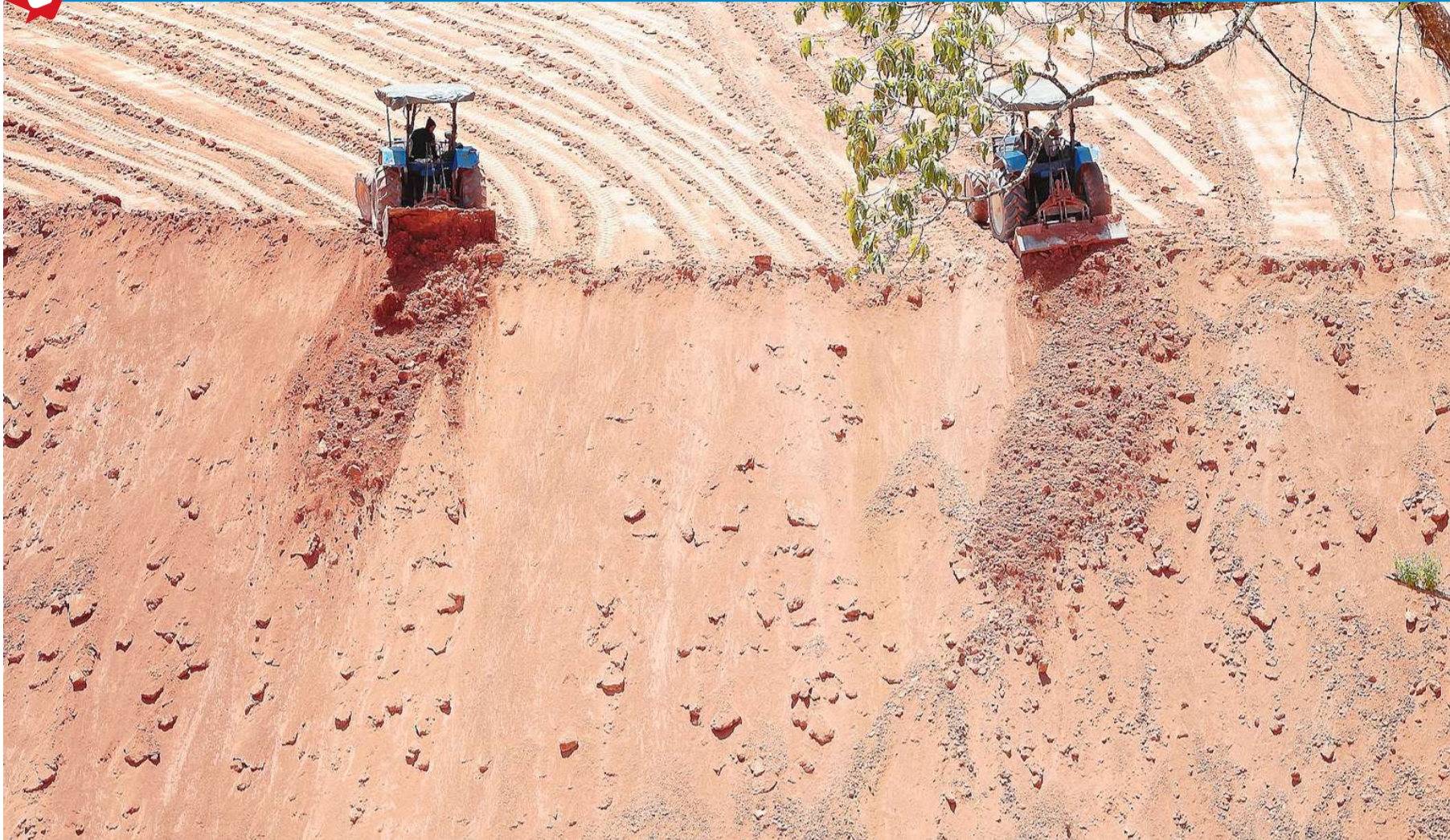
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MOTION & EMOTION

Hills 'raped' at an **alarming** rate



iSnap me for a video on the land clearing in Cameron Highlands



Stripped bare: Tractors being used to level the hills in Cameron Highlands. — Videography by SYAWALLUDIN ZAIN

Cameron Highlands' pristine virgin jungle being cleared with impunity

By **ISABELLE LAI**
isabellelai@thestar.com.my

CAMERON HIGHLANDS: Unsustainable land clearing is continuing on a staggering scale here, with pristine virgin jungle the size of numerous football fields chopped down to make way for agriculture conversion.

A large portion of the land clearing is taking place away from the public eye, as excavators and tractors are kept busy deep in the heart of the jungle, a good hour's drive from the main road.

The bulk of the clearing at Pos Terisu spans at least four hills and valleys, the fresh red earth an ugly scar on the remaining green areas.

Some no longer resemble hills as deep shelves have been cut into the land which is flattened so that farmers can start planting vegetables.

A check by *The Star* showed workers operating the machines at weekends, which is prohibited.

Erosion has affected many of the streams, with the water flowing sluggishly over silt-clogged channels into the rivers.

The clearing is done in areas with very steep slopes, posing a huge danger of landslides when it rains. The road leading to the areas is riddled with huge potholes while one section has partially crumbled.

Regional Environmental Awareness Cameron Highlands president R. Ramakrishnan said the areas in the latest spate of clearing, which began less than a month ago, spanned over 40ha.

He said he had made two or three visits to the areas and observed the rate of clearing had accelerated during the elections.

"The Land Office staff was seconded to the Election Commission. This left the culprits free to do whatever they wanted, including bringing in prohibited heavy machinery.

"The rapid destruction has been stunning," he said, adding that as many as three excava-

This is happening due to influential people who are backing the culprits.

— R. RAMAKRISHNAN

tors and 20 tractors had been spotted in one area.

He pointed to a cleared area on both sides of the Ulu Telom river, which supplies water to the Ulu Jelai hydroelectric dam.

Some of the felled trees had rolled down the sides of the river, while its banks were mostly just slopes of red earth.

He warned that the Ulu Jelai dam would suffer the same fate as the Sultan Abu Bakar dam in Habu if the clearing was not halted immediately.

"The Sultan Abu Bakar dam suffered from uncontrolled land clearing. Massive soil erosion happened and its turbines were affected, so it couldn't function effectively," he said.

He noted that clearing on such a huge scale was illegal and wondered why the authorities had not acted to stop it.

The Star reported in December that continued land clearing over the past decade had caused serious damage to the iconic tourism and agriculture destination, including water pollution due to improper sewage disposal, pesticide run-off and soil erosion.

Ramakrishnan said that his organisation had been highlighting environmental problems in Cameron Highlands for the past 13 years without getting any concrete solutions.

"This is happening due to influential people who are backing the culprits. It is the unholy trinity of inept politicians, (allegedly) corrupt officials and greedy farmers," he said.

"If Cameron Highlands is to be saved, there must be intervention from the very top at the federal level."

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*References: 1. Malaysian Diabetes Association 2. National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIIDK) of the National Institute of Health, USA 3. Diabetes UK 4. National Health & Morbidity Survey 2011, MCH



From forest to farmland: A worker busy preparing the land for farming at a cleared area in Pos Terisu.

Scenic mountain no more

Gunung Perdah ravaged for development and left exposed

By ISABELLE LAI
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CAMERON HIGHLANDS: This area of lush highland forests, scenic beauty and bio-diversity has lost yet another tourism and recreation destination.

The Gunung Perdah hiking trail, situated in Sungai Ruil, Tanah Rata, is linked to Gunung Jasar, a forest reserve often visited by nature lovers.

A Google check on Gunung Perdah reveals numerous blog links by nature lovers, who had documented their hiking adventures at the two mountains.

But the mountain, which is located on state land, has now been ravaged for development to the extent that little of its virgin jungle has been left to boast about.

A site visit showed that a huge portion of the mountain slope has become exposed earth with the areas surrounding it similarly cleared.

Further down the road opposite the mountain, completed houses stand in rows and are believed to be selling for about RM500,000 each.

"At the rate the clearing is being done, the entire mountain will be gone soon.

"Among the casualties are felled cinnamon trees, which were bulldozed without any consideration to conserve them," said Regional Environmental Awareness Cameron Highlands (Reach) president R. Ramakrishnan.

Land clearing in Cameron Highlands

The latest spate of land clearing in Cameron Highlands is happening at Pos Terisu. It spans at least four hills and valleys and began less than a month ago. Clearing has been done in areas with very steep slopes, posing a huge danger of landslides once the rains come. Gunung Perdah in Tanah Rata has also been ravaged for development, to the extent that little of its virgin jungle is left.



Recently highlighted cases:

OCTOBER

- > *The Star* front-paged a series of reports citing illegal land clearing activities taking place throughout Cameron Highlands, namely in Mensun Valley, Brinchang and Tanah Rata.
- > District Officer Datuk Ahmad Daud said he suspected insiders were leaking information to the culprits, resulting in unsuccessful raids.
- > MACC announced it would start a probe to investigate whether it was true.
- > Former Cameron Highlands MP Datuk S.K. Devamany had called for stricter enforcement and a stronger legislative framework to address the issue.

DECEMBER

- > *The Star* front-paged a series of reports giving an overview of massive and unsustainable land clearing in

Cameron Highlands.

- > It revealed that some farmers either did not have permits or flouted regulations when carrying out the land clearings.
- > Water pollution due to pesticide run-off, improper sewage disposal and soil erosion has also affected the health of residents as well as drinking water supply.
- > Many farmers have also illegally tapped water from forest reserves to irrigate their farms.
- > Enforcement officers revealed they sometimes risked bodily harm and feared for their lives when they tried to stop illegal clearing activities.
- > Pahang Sultan Ahmad Shah expressed displeasure at the culprits and called for all such illegal activities to stop, adding that those caught would be taken to court.

He questioned how the authorities allowed the destruction to take place, as Gunung Perdah had been used as a landmark in the map of Cameron Highlands besides attracting hordes of tourists.

He hoped that Cameron Highlands MP and newly appointed Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri G. Palanivel would look into the matter seriously.

"We suspect there are higher powers involved. This is why the local authorities are keeping silent," he said, pointing out that Gunung Perdah was located just off the main road from Tanah Rata to Brinchang.

Ramakrishnan also expressed concern over the wanton practice of "bulldoze and bury",

under which felled trees were just buried under the soil.

He said this could cause long-term problems for future housing owners when the trees rot and cause the soil to sink.

Located near the foot of Gunung Perdah is the orang asli village of Kampung Sungai Ruil, where a devastating landslide in August 2011 killed four women and three men, and seriously wounded two other people.

The villagers were moved out into a temporary settlement in Brinchang but have been waiting for two years for their new houses in Sungai Ruil to be ready.

Assistant village head Shamsuddin Bahzainal, 39, lamented the fate of the moun-

tain, which was the favourite destination of villagers.

Tour guide P. Balan, 36, a third-generation local resident, slammed the continuous clearing work, saying this would drive the tourists away.

He said there had been a drop in the number of Western tourists, who flock to Cameron Highlands more for its nature trails rather than for the farm produce.

"If this doesn't stop, Cameron Highlands won't be any different from Ipoh. The weather has already become significantly warmer," he said, adding that most of the development was done by outsiders who had invested money there.

Kedah to freeze logging activities pending review

ALORSETAR: The Kedah Government has temporarily stopped logging activities in the state pending a study on their impact on the environment and the people's livelihood.

Menteri Besar Datuk Mukhriz Tun Mahathir said this followed complaints from villagers that logging activities in their areas had affected the supply and quality of water.

"Logging activities in the state will

be temporarily ceased to enable us to conduct the environmental impact assessment (EIA) in areas involved.

"They will resume upon the EIA's recommendations," he said at a thanksgiving reception at Seri Mentaloon, the menteri besar's official residence, here yesterday.

Mukhriz said he wanted to ensure that loggers abide by the conditions imposed on logging activities.

"If there is any valid complaint,

backed by concrete evidence that the conditions are not complied with, I will not hesitate to stop the logging activity immediately.

"I want all logging concessions given to be reviewed. We want to ensure the people's interest comes first. In future, as far as possible, I will not approve any more logging concession.

"I think we have enough logging activities in the state. We have to

find other sources of income for Kedah.

"To me, a tree is worth more standing than felled. There are potentials and opportunities for tourism and other industries (to grow)," he added.

Regarding the controversial state-owned Insaniah University Collage (Kuin), Mukhriz said he had met their top management, including rector Prof Dr Jamil Osman, over the

problems faced by the institution.

The menteri besar said state Education, Transport and Works committee chairman Datuk Tajul Urus Mat Zain would look into Kuin's problems and report on a new direction for Kuin.

"We will talk to other parties involved. Most importantly, we will safeguard the welfare of Kuin's students and staff first before that of the management," he said. — Bernama

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Star

Have your say

An exciting new column ...

Open Season! A column that gives space to fresh voices.

> See Page 22



...and we bring back

Cafe latte chat makes a comeback tomorrow as we invite key players to discuss hot topics. Reps from BN, PR and civil society will tussle over the critical issue of national unity.



EXCLUSIVE

Saving the Highlands

Yet another vast area of virgin jungle has been found stripped bare in Cameron Highlands, even as newly-appointed Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri G. Palanivel announced a special task force to work with the Pahang government to stop the ravage of the hills. The rampant clearing of slopes and poor enforcement have led to residents voicing accusations of corruption and protection of the guilty by powerful forces.

> See reports on Page 4 by ISABELLE LAI

Laid bare: Massive land clearing is being done upstream of the Kuala Terla water treatment plant, which supplies more than 60% of water to Tanah Rata up to Kampung Raja. The farms seen next to the cleared land are also upstream of the water intake for the plant. — NORAFIFI EHSAN / The Star



iSnap this article for more photos:



Gutsy swim

Visually-impaired Faiq Adnan battles the waves and jellyfish in crossing the Penang channel. >3

NATION Rush for Becks

David Beckham's retirement has sparked a rush to buy posters of the English footballer. >18

WORLD



Euro queen

Twenty-year-old Danish singer Emmelie de Forest takes the Eurovision song contest crown. >34

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Dept: Less than 1% of forests being illegally logged

IPOH: Less than 1% of the more than 4.7 million hectares of forest reserves in the peninsula are being illegally logged.

Peninsular Malaysia Forestry Department director-general Datuk Dr Abdul Rahman Abdul Rahim said there was a misconception that illegal logging activities were rampant and unchecked.

He said people misunderstood

that logging activities were conducted at forest reserves.

"In the peninsula, we have about 5.6 million hectares of forest land. This is inclusive of forest reserves, government land and privately-owned land," he said, adding that only a small fraction of forest reserves in the peninsula was affected and that illegal logging was under control.

Dr Abdul Rahman was speaking to reporters at the opening of the joint celebrations of the 67th anniversary of RTM, International Forest Day and World Communication Day by Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Zambry Abdul Kadir here yesterday.

Dr Abdul Rahman, however, declined to comment on the reported destruction of 40ha of virgin forest in Cameron Highlands.

"We'll leave it to the ministry concerned to answer on the matter. I'm in no position to do so," he said.

The issue was frontpaged in *Sunday Star* which reported that the bulk of the alleged ravaging at Pos Terisu spans at least four valleys and hills being flattened to plant vegetables.

Dr Abdul Rahman, however, thanked the media for highlighting

matters pertaining to illegal logging activities.

In his opening speech, Dr Zambry said Perak had planted some 10.9 million trees under the *1Citizen 1Tree* initiative since 2010.

"I believe we can plant about another two million trees to make Perak a greener state," he said, reminding that the national target was to plant 26 million trees.

Task force formed to salvage Camerons

Part of jungle stripped bare even as ministry moves in to tackle problem

By ISABELLE LAI

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CAMERON HIGHLANDS: A special task force to be set up under the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry will work with the Pahang Government to tackle the widespread ravage of Cameron Highlands.

But even as newly-appointed Minister Datuk Seri G. Palanivel announced this yesterday, another huge tract of virgin jungle was found stripped bare to make way for more vegetable farms.

The ongoing uncontrolled clearing of jungle slopes has led to residents to voice accusations of corruption involving officials and protection by powerful hidden forces.

The latest area of rape, spread over about 10ha, is located upstream of the crucial Kuala Terla water catchment area. Part of it is behind a steep hill and hidden from view.

Palanivel, who is also Cameron Highlands MP, said the wanton destruction of the hills must be stopped.

"The ministry has its plans in line. It will be my duty to implement them and initiate further action," he told *The Star*.

He said the special task force was necessary because the highlands needed urgent attention to safeguard them from further harm, adding that remedial work to repair existing damage was costly.

The minister said unbridled damage had also led to poor water quality in the rivers, siltation, soil erosion and frequent landslides in many places.

"Many people's lives are affected because they rely on the rivers as their source of water, especially the *orang asli*," he said

Environmental organisations,

The lack of enforcement has led many locals to believe widespread corruption is taking place.

— R. RAMAKRISHNAN

including the locally based Regional Environmental Awareness Cameron Highlands (Reach), have repeatedly highlighted illegal land clearing cases over the years.

Reach president R. Ramakrishnan expressed his frustration over the dire situation and ineffective enforcement methods of the authorities.

"The lack of enforcement has led many locals to believe widespread corruption is taking place," he said.

A check at the latest cleared site showed workers busy levelling the terrain behind the hill using an excavator and four tractors.

They stopped abruptly upon realising they were being filmed.

Apparently, the workers had been pushing felled tree trunks and boulders into a valley where a stream merges with Sungai Icat.

Sungai Icat flows into Sungai Terla, where water is drawn from the catchment area.

The Kuala Terla water treatment plant, located downstream, supplies 60% of water to Tanah Rata and Kampung Raja.

The stream is now choked by silt and felled trees, while farm waste such as fertiliser bags are found strewn near the water.

Ramakrishnan said the authorities



iSnap me for more photos and video on the widespread rampage of Cameron Highlands



Crying hills: Workers busy levelling freshly cleared terrain upstream of the Kuala Terla water treatment plant, which supplies 60% of water to Tanah Rata and Brinchang. — Videography by SYAWALLUDIN ZAIN / The Star

were supposed to close down the farms when the issue was first highlighted but had allowed them to grow to a staggering 80 in just a few years.

He said enforcement officers from the Land Office had visited the place in early May.

"But they came back empty-handed as the workers had left the site. Most likely, they had been informed of the raid.

"This is why I believe that either the local authorities or somebody high up is backing the culprits," he said.

Another patch of steep slope in Perlong Valley is also being cleared behind the Kuala Terla water treatment plant, with a large stream next to it already showing a massive pile

up of silt.

The Star reported in December that the silted-up stream had overflowed its boundaries during the rainy season and caused a portion of the only road leading into the area to cave in completely.

A culvert has now been built under the repaired road, which has not yet been tarred, to direct the flow into Sungai Telom, downstream of the water intake.

"The culvert has made things even worse. Instead of trapping the silt, it is now an open channel for all the silt to flow into Sungai Telom," Ramakrishnan said.

Malaysian Nature Society president Prof Dr Maketab Mohamed said that as Sungai Telom flows into the new Ulu Jelai hydroelectric dam, the

sedimentation would affect the turbines and cause the dam to fill up quickly.

"When I studied Cameron Highlands' waters about five years ago, there were about 20 vegetable farms upstream. Now, there are 80," he said sadly.

He led the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia study in Oct 2008, which detected *E.coli* bacteria at the Sungai Terla and Ulu Bertam watersheds, revealing contamination from unsanitary worker toilets and from fertilisers such as chicken droppings.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia researchers detected two toxic and illegal pesticides – DDT and lindane – in Sungai Telom and Sungai Bertam last year.

Stern action to be taken against the culprits

CAMERON HIGHLANDS: Those caught carrying out illegal land clearing will be arrested immediately, said Cameron Highlands Land and District Officer Datuk Ahmad Daud.

He said he had directed his enforcement officers to conduct a raid in the wake of *The Star*'s report yesterday over the extensive clearing of slopes in Pos Terisu.

Over 40ha of land spread over four valleys and hills were found stripped of forests in less than a month, with the areas levelled for vegetable farming.

Ahmad said his office had no prior

knowledge of the activities, as the location was deep in the heart of the jungle.

"We only found out about it from *The Star*. I am very angry with these culprits.

"If they are caught, we will bring them to court," he said.

Ahmad said it was difficult to detect illegal clearing in Cameron Highlands because it was done secretly behind the hills.

He said he would investigate whether the *orang asli* living there had "leased" the land illegally to the farmers who wanted to open up

new areas to grow vegetables.

Ahmad said he would also probe the ruins of Gunung Perdah, where used to host a popular hiking trail linked to Gunung Jasar.

He urged the public to report any clearing occurrence to the District Office so immediate investigations and actions could be taken.

On the unsuccessful raids so far, he said perhaps someone had leaked information to the workers to prevent them from getting caught at the sites.

However, he said he could not speculate on who the culprits were,

adding that it could also be people outside his office.

During *The Star*'s site visit, an interview with the village chief's stepdaughter confirmed that some of the *orang asli* had "leased" some areas of land to the farmers for around RM600 a month.

Saimah Ajok, 33, said that although her stepfather had forbidden such practices, some people still did it.

"They go about it in a curi-curi (stealthy) way. Whoever brings them (the farmers) there will get paid," she said.

She said there were too many

farms in the area and the resulting water pollution from pesticides and land clearing had made the river unusable.

Saimah said the *orang asli* could still get clean drinking water from the mountain but could no longer use the river water flowing past their village.

"We still bathe the small children in the river sometimes. Some of us have also suffered from diarrhoea as well as skin problems," she said, adding that heavy rains brought the worry of floods and landslides because of soil erosion.

Pos Terisu areas **raided**

Officers find illegal farms cleared of workers and machines

Exclusive

By **ISABELLE LAI**
isabellelai@thestar.com.my

CAMERON HIGHLANDS: The District and Land Office raided four areas in Pos Terisu for illegal land clearing but only managed to tear down the workers' quarters as all the machinery had been removed.

When enforcement officers arrived at around 11am yesterday, the cleared areas were empty of workers and machines.

Fresh excavator tracks could be seen along the side of the only road leading into the area inhabited by the orang asli, possibly made less than 24 hours earlier.

The Star had reported on Sunday that over 40ha of virgin jungle had been destroyed for farming activities, with excavators and tractors spotted working over the weekend.

Following the report, District Officer Datuk Ahmad Daud instructed that the raid take place and said his officers would confiscate any machinery.

He expressed disappointment at the outcome of yesterday's raid, saying those involved might have been tipped off by media coverage.

"We will keep going back to the area and conduct continuous monitoring. If we spot the workers and machinery being used, then we will take action," said Ahmad.

Fifteen officers from his office, led by Abdul Rahim Sulaiman, were joined by five officers from the Pahang Land and Mines Office, led by Mokhtar Mohd Yunus.

The 20 officers in a four-vehicle convoy, stopped first at a hilltop clearing which already had an illegal farm, complete with furnished workers' quarters including a toilet.

The existing farm plots showed different stages of vegetable growth, while seedlings and pesticides were also found.

Abdul Rahim had ordered all the workers' belongings, including a TV, DVD player and a chicken coop, with four chickens inside, removed.



Torn down: Enforcement officers destroying newly built workers' quarters on illegally cleared land in Pos Terisu.

They then used machetes and axes to tear down the structure as well as the water pipes and sprinklers.

Another workers' quarters which looked new and were empty, were also taken apart nearby.

Their attempts to destroy a steel bridge down the road built to enable machinery to cross into yet another cleared area failed as they did not have the right tools.

The officers hammered signboards, warning against trespassing on state land, at the four areas.

Ahmad said his men would return to tear down the bridge, adding that they would also investigate the issue of "leased land" by the orang asli.

He also denied allegations of corruption within his office.

"We are the same as any other department. Sometimes we have successful enforcement activities, and sometimes we don't get to catch the culprits," he said, insisting that they had made many seizures of machinery in the past.



Fair warning: Officers putting up a signboard to warn against trespassing at the area.

Land clearing done legally, says Adnan

By **SIMON KHOO and ISABELLE LAI**
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KUANTAN: The clearing of land in Pos Terisu, Cameron Highlands, was done in accordance with the laws for the benefit of orang asli villagers, Pahang Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob said.

Adnan said an agreement was signed between the Orang Asli Development Department and a private firm to develop about 24.28 ha of agriculture land.

"The agreement was signed for five years effective from July 2006 to June 2011 to develop the land for cultivation purposes for RM5,500 per ha per year," he said after chairing a special executive councillors meeting here yesterday.

Adnan said since 2008, 55 orang asli families received RM800 each per year from the company and the

payment was raised to RM1,800 each in 2009, RM2,400 in 2010 and RM4,040 in 2011.

"The process is all in order and does not involve any element of corruption and abuse of power as alleged by some quarters.

"However, in my opinion, although nobody should be faulted, the activity is detrimental to the environment and affect the lives of residents in Cameron Highlands which is definitely not good," he said.

He said the state government would take action to prevent further deterioration to the environment.

Adnan said he had contacted and thanked Regional Environmental Awareness Cameron Highlands president R. Ramakrishnan for highlighting the issue.

On Sunday, *The Star* front-paged

a report of land-clearing activities in Pos Terisu with at least four valleys and hills being flattened for farmers to plant vegetables.

Ramakrishnan, meanwhile, said Adnan was mistaken about the location of several areas in Pos Terisu that have undergone massive land clearing.

He said the land clearing that Adnan referred to was in another area entirely.

"The areas highlighted by *The Star* are new areas of land being cleared that had begun less than a month ago, two years after the agreement expired. The new areas are in Pos Terisu but beyond Kampung Sg Jarik," he said.

Ramakrishnan pointed out that even District and Land Officer Datuk Ahmad Daud was unaware of these new clearings prior to the news report.

When met, Kampung Sg Jarik village chief Johari Along, 44, said the orang asli did not approve of the new areas which had been cleared.

He said their agreements with the farmers were done on a smaller scale, whereby the orang asli families who wanted their own farm plots would clear the land manually.

"Those who allow their land to be farmed on commercial basis will receive RM300 monthly and the land would be returned to them after five years," he said.

Johari's brother Yusof, 52, as well as another villager, Ismail Garak, 48, lamented the loss of the area that had been illegally cleared.

Ismail said there had once been petai trees as well as other food sources which they had planted there. The nearby burial site had also been destroyed.

PAS absent, so council obtains court's judgment

KUALA LUMPUR: The Kemaman Municipal Council has obtained a judgment in default against PAS after the political party failed to appear in court over a RM5mil defamation suit filed by the council.

High Court's Justice Rosilah Yop yesterday allowed the council's application for a judgment in default of appearance with RM2,000 in costs.

Speaking to the media later, lead counsel Azwan Abdul Wahab said the judge had set June 13 for general and special damages to be assessed.

He said PAS had not responded to the suit although it was served with the document on April 8.

In its lawsuit filed on March 22, the council claimed that PAS had defamed it through leaflets distributed during a Hari Raya event in Chukai, Terengganu, last year.

The council alleged PAS had defamed it in leaflets over the building and maintenance of its zoo.

It claimed the two-page leaflets implied that the council had misused public funds and built a zoo that gave no benefit to the local people.

The council said the contents had meant that it had been careless in its financial management of the zoo and was therefore untrustworthy and unethical.

Among others, the council sought for RM5mil in general damages for libel and to stop PAS from further publishing and distributing the leaflets.

In its statement of claim, the council said it would prove to the court that the leaflets contained false and libellous statements besides referring to the council as being responsible for the zoo.

It said its solicitor had sent to PAS a letter, dated Jan 16, seeking for an apology but the party chose not to give any explanation.

Five arrested in raid at gambling dens

IPOH: Police have arrested five men and seized 63 computers, believed to be for gambling activities, during a raid at several premises in Taman Cempaka here.

IpoH OCPD Asst Comm Sum Chang Keong said police began their raid at five gambling dens last week.

"The four-hour raid ended at about 2am and we have taken back the computers to the district police station," he said yesterday.

ACP Sum said the five men, aged between 25 and 35, were believed to be the supervisors of the premises and had been released on police bail.

On another unrelated incident, ACP Sum said three suspects had attempted to cart away an ATM in Chemor between Sunday night and Monday morning.

"Two of the suspects, decked in ski masks and long sleeves shirts, pried open the ATM's outer cabinet using a crowbar but were unable to take away the money," he said.

"They also failed to remove the ATM from the bank using a car, driven by a third suspect."