



KERATAN AKHBAR

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A screenshot from Google Earth that Sahabat Alam Malaysia received allegedly showing hill clearing in Batu Ferringhi. PIC COURTESY OF SAHABAT ALAM MALAYSIA

'Batu Ferringhi hill being cleared'

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TRACKS of hill in Batu Ferringhi, off Persiaran Sungai Emas 3 here, have recently been cleared, Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) claims.

It claimed that checks near the site found that the slope was being terraced.

It is not immediately known the reason behind the clearing or who owned the land.

SAM, which was alerted to the matter, urged the Penang state and local authorities to check the hill clearing at the site.

SAM president Meenakshi Raman said a recent field investigation conducted after receiving the complaint found that the hill slope was being terraced, most probably for agriculture purposes.

She said the complainant sent the non-governmental organisation screenshots from Google Earth that clearly showed tracts of hill were being cleared.

"During SAM's survey, we found the access route which leads to the cleared land, but were unable to go any further to avoid trespassing as we were uncertain of the status of the land.

"SAM feels that the hill land clearing is a disaster waiting to happen, besides destruction to the forested area. If there is constant and intense rainfall, the chances for land-

slides and erosion to occur are high.

"SAM urges the authorities to visit the site to investigate the status of the land, the nature of work being done and whether it is illegal clearing," she said yesterday.

She said the authorities must disclose whether the work there contravened the Land Conservation Act 1960, which relates to the conservation of hill land, protection of soil from erosion and the inroad of silt.

"SAM urges the authorities to take prompt action on the hill land clearing and other areas, as a check on Google Earth shows that there are quite a number of hill slopes being cleared on the hill range there and other parts of the island.

"Our hills are fragile and past tragedies should serve as a lesson. We need to safeguard and protect the ecosystem of our hills."

State Environment Committee chairman Phee Boon Poh told the *New Straits Times* that the Penang Island City Council was aware of the hill land clearing and had taken action.

It is learnt the land clearing was being done by a third party, possibly for agriculture, without the consent of land owners.

"We can confirm that a stop-work order has been issued and clearing work has stopped," Phee said, adding that the authorities were checking on land titles and investigating who the owners were.