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Pahang defends move against land intrusion

Action will be taken without compromise, says state secretary

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KUANTAN: The Pahang government has defended enforcement operations against illegal land encroachment in Cameron Highlands, saying it's a matter of public importance to ensure environmental sustainability.

State Secretary Datuk Seri Dr Sallehuddin Ishak said phase one of the operations involved 11 illegal land encroachments, while phase two involved 37 with a total area of 121ha.

He said eviction notices had already been issued since Aug 19, 2009 but these illegal activities continued.

"The state government has always made sure every enforcement action is carried out according to the rule of law.

"As proof, the previous demolition action in Sungai Ichat was halted after the settlers obtained an interim injunction dated March 11 from the Kuantan High Court.

"However, the plaintiffs withdrew their application and stopped the suit on Sept 30."

Sallehuddin said that following a visit by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, the National Security Council decided to place Armed Forces and General Operations Force personnel in Cameron Highlands to thwart illegal land encroachment and also to show their presence.

Subsequently, the Cameron Highlands Rehabilitation Joint Action Committee, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and Pahang Menteri Besar, agreed to continue Ops Lestari 2 and mobilise security forces beginning Dec 16.

Tanah Rata assemblyman Chiong Yoke Kong had recently urged the state government to postpone its enforcement operations in Cameron Highlands until after Chinese New Year.

Chiong said the state government might have strong reasons for conducting enforcement on some vegetable farms but he hoped time would be given to the affected farmers so they could reap their harvest.

The state government had previously pointed out that encroachment into the Kuala Terla water catchment area in Cameron Highlands was the source of pollution, especially in Sungai Ichat.

The encroachment also disrupted water flow from the river into the Kuala Terla water treatment plant.

Sallehuddin said the state government was committed to proceed with the enforcement and would not compromise for the sake of sustainability and the prosperity of the people in the district.

He said the Kuala Terla water treatment plant was the biggest and most important plant supplying 70% of clean water in Cameron Highlands but the raw water flow of Sungai Terla could no longer accommodate current needs and development in the near future.

"Thus, to further increase the volume of raw water, the Sungai Ichat water flow is much needed.

"Based on monitoring by Perbadanan Air Pahang (PAIP), the water quality of Sungai Ichat has begun to recover after enforcement action was taken while clean-up work is also being undertaken nearly every week by PAIP," he added.