

Tanjung Bungah high-risk location, says expert



Highrise housing in Tanjung Bungah. Habibah says landslides are prone in the area because the soil composition is largely made of rocks that are being eroded.

GEORGE TOWN — Tanjung Bungah has been identified as a high-risk location for landslides over the last five years, said a disaster management expert.

USM lecturer Prof Habibah Lateh said mapping of hazardous landslides carried out by the university in a study conducted with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Higher Education Ministry revealed the soil composition in Tanjung Bungah was largely made of granite rocks that are being eroded.

She said eroded granite rocks were more inclined to cause landslides because the soil was not cohesive, leading to the

instability of slopes.

“In some parts of the area in Tanjung Bungah, granite rocks have experienced a high degree of erosion and turned into silty sand that can easily cause landslides,” she said.

Habibah, a senior lecturer in the university’s Distance Learning Centre, said generally the slope composition in Penang was quite different from other places in Malaysia as they are composed of silt rock mixed with boulders.

“High temperatures and heavy rain can cause physical and chemical erosion to occur at a high rate, increasing the risk of slope

collapse, especially at areas with mostly granite rocks,” she said.

She did not rule out the possibility the quarry project near the site of the deadly landslide on Oct 21 was a factor in the disaster. The landslide, which occurred at the construction site of an affordable housing project in Tanjung Bungah, killed 11 workers.

“This is because blasting activities at the quarry can loosen rocks and soil,” she said.

Habibah said based on recent research on residents staying near hillslopes, it was found that many were aware of the dangers and risks but only took a wait-and-see attitude.

“They would rather give priority to the

luxury factor and beautiful scenery after buying a house in the area,” she said.

Habibah said there were plans by USM and the National Disaster Management Agency to enhance public awareness on landslides, especially in Penang.

She said cooperation among government agencies and universities was important in disaster management and creating awareness on landslides and other natural disasters to save lives and property.

At the same time, developers should not only be interested in profits without considering the safety aspects, she said.

— Bernama

Group: Penang govt, council at odds over hillslope projects

GEORGE TOWN — Following the fatal landslide on Oct 21, a residents’ group has asked the state government and the local council to explain their conflicting policies and approaches on highrise development on hillslopes.

Tanjung Bungah Residents Association (TBRA) chairman Meenakshi Raman claimed the Penang Island City Council (MBPP) had approved construction of highrise apartments and bungalows on land above 76m for the Sunway City project in Sungai Ara five years ago, based on the state’s 2009 guidelines for “special projects”.

“We are shocked to learn that the state authority had in 2011 approved an application by the developer to remove the ‘hill land’ status of the land under the

Land Conservation Act 1960,” she said in a statement yesterday.

Meenakshi, a lawyer and activist, insisted the council’s approval to amend the hill land status ran “completely” against the state government’s stance “that hill land must be protected”.

She was referring to the assurance made by housing development committee chairman Jagdeep Singh Deo that the state government prohibits new highrise development on land higher than 76m above sea level.

She claimed the Sungai Ara project was for 600 units on 32ha at 76m above sea level with 43 per cent of the units on slopes exceeding a gradient of 25 degrees.

Meenakshi said the state government must now revise and redefine the term “special projects” under its 2009 guidelines to prohibit future developments on hill land except for essential public amenities.

“The state must also stop approving any further applications for excision of the status of ‘hill land’ from the Land Conservation Act 1960,” she said.

She called on the state authorities and the council to monitor development on hill land and hillslopes in Penang and take immediate measures to ensure the safety of those living at the foothills of such development, such as those in Taman Seri Rambai and Taman Lau Geok Swee in Paya Terubong.

“We want the Penang government and MBPP to clarify why it (the council) is

not following the policy in the Penang Structural Plan, which designates Tanjung Bungah as being in the secondary corridor,” she said.

Meenakshi said the structure plan clearly states housing development in Tanjung Bungah cannot exceed 15 units per acre, yet this policy was not followed.

The Tanjung Bungah Residents Association also said it welcomed the state’s proposal to set up a State Commission of Inquiry (SCI) into the landslide in Lembah Permai that killed 11 workers.

“We ask that the SCI be open to the public to ensure transparency, and that it also allow participation of all stakeholders, including TBRA,” Meenakshi said.

— Malay Mail Online