

21/08/2002

Condo project may disturb Cameron's fragile ecosystem

TANAH RATA, Tues. - Residents here are worried that a condominium project which has been given the go-ahead will threaten the highland's fragile ecosystem and their quality of life.

Their nightmare began in March this year following a Cabinet decision to allow five apartment projects to proceed after the developers amended their building plans to avoid any construction on Class IV slopes.

The five were part of the eight projects frozen over a year ago pending a study.

They were given the green light after meeting the guidelines on highlands development.

Under the guidelines, development is completely banned on Class IV slopes, categorised as having a gradient of 35 degrees or more.

However, the residents are determined to get the Government to reconsider future developments in the highlands and stop further degradation.

Towards this end, the Society of Regional Environmental Awareness of Cameron Highlands (Reach) has started a campaign to collect about 2,000 signatures for a petition to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"At present we have collected about 1,500 signatures and the move to get more is on-going," a Reach member, Jay Gomathi Richards said yesterday.

The petition aims to bring to the attention of the Prime Minister, Minister of Science, Technology and Environment Datuk Law Hieng Ding and district officer Haron Abdul Kader the residents' concern over the deplorable state and continued degradation of Cameron Highlands.

Jay said while residents were overwhelmingly campaigning against the development, one of the developers had started clearing the jungle near the Heritage Hotel in Tanah Rata to build an access route to the project site.

"It seems the developer is in a hurry to start the project. We are not sure why the rush," another Reach member, Jason Chin said.

Chin used to work with the Malaysian Nature Society and was involved with a study on ecosystem of the surrounding hills in Cameron Highlands.

He said the residential projects would damage some of the unique flora and fauna found here.

"The forest used to be part of the Mentigi Forest Reserve, but has been degazetted for development," he said, adding that if projects were allowed to resume streams flowing through the forest would be badly affected.

"These streams are a source of water for areas such as Ringlet, Lembah Bertam and Habu," Chin said.

Meanwhile, when contacted this morning, Tanah Rata Assemblyman, who is State Unity and Consumer Affairs Committee chairman, Datuk Law Kee Long said he was unsure whether the project had been given the green light to resume.