

15 FEB 2003

Sultan-Cameroon

PAHANG SULTAN TICKS OFF COMPANY FOR IGNORING THE LAW

CAMERON HIGHLANDS, Feb 15 (Bernama) -- The Sultan of Pahang, Sultan Ahmad Shah, today reprimanded a company for levelling a highland here for vegetable farming, saying "nobody is more powerful than the laws of the country."

He said Syarikat Deng Seng Enterprise Sdn Bhd had clearly defied the law by using heavy machinery to flatten the land while it was only authorised to use light machinery.

He said the company had made two mistakes by assuming the local authorities understood that what was done would reduce soil erosion and it had acted without permission from the authorities.

"You never discuss with the authorities, it's only your assumption. Nobody in Malaysia is above the law, including me," he told a briefing by the company's Director Kwang Keh Chong at the site.

Earth-levelling work at the former site of Blue Valley Estate created a controversy when the company ignored two stop-work orders issued by the district land office.

The Sultan said he was saddened by the company's action which could cause adverse effects to the environment here.

The company's action caught the attention of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who criticised the damage inflicted to the environment in Cameron Highlands by indiscriminately levelling highland.

Following Dr Mahathir's statement, Pahang Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob announced an immediate freeze on all new development projects in Cameron Highlands.

Present at the briefing were Adnan, senior state government officials and Cameron Highlands District Officer Haron Abdul Kader.

The Sultan said he conducted an aerial surveillance of the area yesterday and he could see the damage done to the area.

"Syarikat Deng Seng and its contractor never thought that their action will create problems to the local authority, smallholders and the public," he said.

Kwang, in his briefing to the Sultan, said his company was given approval by the District Office to clear and develop the eight-hectare land using light earth-moving equipment.

He, however, said after using the small machinery for a month, the progress was slow and the contractor decided to use bigger equipment.

"Once they started using heavy machines, work was progressing faster and erosion was better controlled.

Based on this reason, the contractor decided to continue using heavy machinery assuming that the authorities would understand the reasons for it.

"Never did Deng Seng and the contractor realised that by using heavy equipment it will create all these troubles to the local authority," he said.

Kwang apologised to those who got into trouble, embarrassed and inconvenienced with the press reports on the issue which he claimed was blown out of proportion.

The Sultan said the media should not be blamed because they have the right and have their own reasons to publish the report on the company's action.

The Sultan told reporters later that he was satisfied with the briefing

as Kwang had revealed everything.

"Now, it's up to the state government to look into the matter," he said.

Adnan said his directive to put on hold new development projects in Cameron Highlands was still in force until further notice.

-- BERNAMA

KAY AR TS