

07/02/2003

Firm: Reconsider freeze order on Cameron Highlands projects

CAMERON HIGHLANDS, Thurs. - Owner of the eight-hectare vegetable farm in Blue Valley, Deng Seng Enterprise Sdn Bhd, today appealed to the Government to reconsider its decision to freeze all development projects at the highland resort.

Director Kwang Keh Chong said this was to enable the company to continue with its vegetable farming activities so that area which had been levelled for the project would not be left exposed.

He said high-technology used at the vegetable farm was productive and could be used to promote modern agriculture methods among farmers.

Furthermore, he said, the vegetable farm had often been used as a referral centre for modern methods in planting and that the Agriculture Minister Datuk Mohd Effendi Norwawi had visited the farm and encouraged such modern methods be utilised to produce quality vegetables and increase production.

"When the minister visited the farm last year, he encouraged modern techniques in planting vegetables.

"Vegetables produced by our farm using modern methods, including hydroponics technology, result in quality vegetables which are safe from chemicals," he said when met at the vegetable farm here today.

Kwang said a five-page memorandum had been submitted to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Affendi, Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Law Hieng Ding and Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob.

"A copy of the memorandum was delivered to Dr Mahathir this morning and we hope the Government will reconsider its decision," he said.

Yesterday the Pahang Government ordered an immediate freeze on all development projects in Cameron Highlands until laws, especially the Land Conservation Act 1960, were amended to allow for stiffer penalties.

Five projects, four involving mixed development and the fifth, a vegetable farm owned by Deng Seng, were affected by the freeze.

Deng Seng comprises several companies which are mainly involved in farming activities.

Cameron Highlands district officer Haron Abdul Kader had said last Friday that Deng Seng had defied two stop-work orders issued by his office by using heavy machinery and not covering exposed slopes.

Signs of erosions are visible in some areas with red soil washed down by the rain water having accumulated in a small stream nearby.

Kwang said it was not fair that the company had to stop work as the Cameron Highlands District Council had approved plans for the project, including issuing a work permit, before the project began two months ago.

The stop-work order issued by the council was because the company had violated the Land Conservation Act 1960, by using 10 heavy machinery to level the hilly area.

"The eight-hectare plot which has been levelled is part of the 24ha land owned by Deng Seng.

"We are not opening up new areas, but only developing our land," he said.

Kwang said the use of heavy machinery, including bulldozers, was to speed up work in levelling and clearing hill slopes so that planting of vegetables could start immediately after the current rainy season.

He said a Dutch consultant appointed by the company, Asian Perlite

Industries Sdn Bhd, had advised that the slopes be levelled for easier irrigation.

Asian Perlite managing director Luuk Runia said although the land had been levelled, the occurrence of landslides were minimised, because the excess soil removed during the levelling process would be compiled in between two valleys while a stream would be created for irrigation purposes.

Meanwhile, Cameron Highlands Indian Vegetable Farmers Association president P. Viswanathan said the Pahang Government should be more specific when it ordered the freeze on all development projects on the highland resort.

He said in the long run the freeze would adversely affect the livelihood of some 5,000 farmers in the area.

"We hope the on-going farming activities by farmers would be allowed to continue as it does not involve opening up of new areas or development," he said.

A check by the New Straits Times at the site today showed that most of the heavy machinery had been removed and no workers were present.