

Cameron Highlands under threat

NEGATIVE IMPACT: Intensive farming and development have contributed to the environmental degradation of the popular tourist destination

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INTENSIVE agricultural activities and development in recent years have contributed to the environmental degradation of Cameron Highlands.

Regional Environmental Awareness of Cameron Highlands (REACH) president R. Ramakrishna said more land parcels were being opened up for farming and construction projects and many of these were on steep gradients.

He said farms were opened and construction work were carried out without regard to the laws, rules and regulations.

"The effects of such blatant violations and poor enforcement can



R. Ramakrishna showing some of the **rubbish** found on the banks of **Sungai Bertam**.

Pix by L. Manimaran

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'Tougher action needed to protect highlands'

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be seen in the main rivers in Cameron Highlands. Just look at Sungai Bertam," said Ramakrishna.

A recent check revealed the shocking state of the river which is one of the three main rivers in the highlands. The other two are Sungai Telom and Sungai Lemoi.

Snaking through the highlands' only golf course before cascading into the Parit and Robinson falls, between which lies the touristic town of Tanah Rata, Sungai Bertam is one of the highlands' source of electricity.

About 300m after passing through the town of Tanah Rata, the river water is drawn into a huge pipeline via the Robinson's Intake to channel it to its turbines nearby.

Tenaga Nasional Bhd watchman Havari Dass, who has been based at Robinson's Intake for 15 years, said he had watched the river deteriorate.

He said the Robinson turbines had the capacity to produce 900 kilowatts of power but today they can only produce up to 600 kilowatts.

Havari said this was due to heavy siltation and sedimentation caused by farms and construction projects as well as garbage being dumped indiscriminately upstream.

"I have even found refrigerators, television sets and cupboards on top of fertiliser and plastic bags, animal carcasses and household rubbish.



*The **silt** is said to come from farm and construction projects.*

"Every day, I have to remove garbage from entering the pipeline. I can remove the garbage but nothing much can be done when it comes to siltation and sedimentation," said Havari.

He said the intake's depth through which water was drawn into the pipeline used to be 3.3m.

"However, due to human activities upstream, siltation has caused the intake's depth to narrow to 1.2m. This is why the turbines cannot operate at full capacity.

"Over the last 15 years, I have watched this river every day and I can say with certainty that its health has gone from bad to worse."

For Ramakrishna, perhaps it is al-

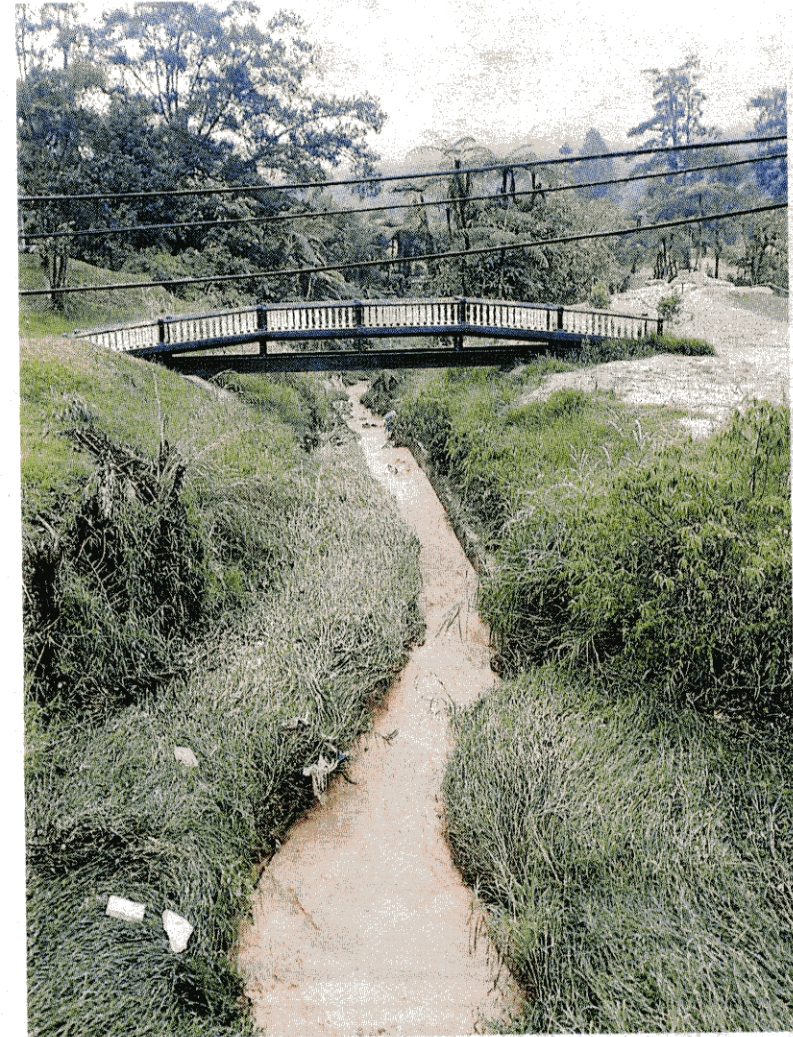
ready too late to save the river.

"We have fought to save the highlands but things are only getting worse.

"The degraded state of Sungai Bertam is only one of the many environmental casualties," said Ramakrishna, as he looked towards the garbage-strewn Bertam river.

REACH recently sent a memorandum to Pahang Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob urging the state government to take tougher action against those who were contributing to environmental damage in the highlands.

A copy of the memorandum was also sent to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.



*Sungai Ruil is **brown with silt**.*