



An aerial view of a section of the river in Ringlet in Cameron Highlands recently. Pix by Effendy Rashid

Mud flood could've been avoided

ADVICE IGNORED: TNB, authorities held sessions with villagers to warn of risks

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THE Oct 23 mud flood that swept Bertam Valley here and claimed four lives could have been avoided if villagers and farmers heeded the advice by the authorities.

Local authorities and Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB) have held sessions with villagers and farmers to highlight the dangers they faced, including floods that would be brought on by the high volume of sediment at the Sultan Abu Bakar

Hydroelectric Dam's Ringlet reservoir.

Cameron Highlands TNB Power Stations general manager Mustafa Hashim said the company was among several bodies that were involved in the Cameron Highlands Engagement and Consultation Programme, organised by the district and land office.

They held four sessions with villagers and farmers in Cameron Highlands. TNB participated in three.

"During these sessions, we covered the effects of riverbank ero-

sion to our reservoir, sedimentation and accumulation of tonnes of garbage at Tasik Ringlet, as well as how floods can affect Bertam Valley," he told the *New Straits Times* (NST) when met at the Habu Power Station here last week.

Those present were warned about the dangers of living in areas downstream of the dam.

The villagers and farmers were shown a graphic simulation of the flood risk they faced if the water level in the catchment areas rose to dangerous levels and TNB would be forced to release water in stages.

Mustafa said at least 60 per cent of the Ringlet reservoir (with a 4.6 million cubic metres capacity) was filled with eroded soil, dumped



A swathe of bare land can be seen at the top of a hill in the Ulu Jelai area in Cameron Highlands.

agricultural waste and garbage.

"This has reduced the reservoir's capability to store water. The man-made lake has an original depth of between 23m and 28m, but now, its

depth has lessened to only between 6m and 9m. We attribute this to uncontrolled land development along the rivers in Cameron High-

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Farms, villages too close to Sg Bertam

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lands, besides the dumping of garbage and agricultural waste into water sources.”

In 2010, TNB closed the dam for three months and spent RM80 million to pump out water and conduct dredging to clean the Ringlet reservoir.

Mustafa said in the Oct 23 incident, TNB was forced to open one of the dam's four spillway gates, which functions to release water in stages. This was because the dam's underground water outlet that channelled water out of the dam in low volumes could not function, as it was blocked by rubbish.

Sungai Bertam is gazetted as a reserved river and by law, it should have at least a 40m width. No settlement or permanent building is allowed to be built 20m from each side of its banks and at least 5km downstream of the dam.

However, during an aerial view tour around the Habu, Ringlet and Ulu Jelai areas here organised by TNB last week, NST saw that none

of these regulations was observed by villagers and farmers.

Villages in Bertam Valley were located only 1.3km downstream of the Sultan Abu Bakar Hydroelectric Dam. The river is also nowhere near 40m in width. This is part of the reason why water tends to rise rapidly when the dam's door is opened to release water.

Hundreds of farms were seen operating on both sides of the riverbank, as well as upstream and downstream of the dam.

Environmentalists blame these farms, especially those atop hills, as the main contributors to soil erosion, as they cause loose soil and rainwater to flow into the rivers more rapidly.

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Garbage that has been dredged out of the Sultan Abu Bakar Hydroelectric Dam's **Ringlet reservoir** in **Cameron Highlands** yesterday. Bernama pic