

Camerons' land clearing to blame

CONTRIBUTOR: Such activities have resulted in bare and unstable soil, causing mud floods, says MB

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TENAGA Nasional Bhd yesterday said it was forced to open the spillway gates of the Sultan Abu Bakar Dam in stages on Wednesday as the water behind its walls rose to nearly critical levels.

However, the blame for the floods, which hit the Ringlet area and have so far seen three people killed and four injured, with two more people missing and feared dead, was placed on excessive land clearing activities and "unplanned development" in Cameron Highlands.

Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob and Tanah Rata assemblyman Leong Ngah Ngah both hit out at irresponsible parties who had been clearing land indiscriminately, causing the mud floods and landslides, just over a year after the deadly Bertam Valley mudflow killed four people on Oct 23 last year.

"Excessive land-clearing activities and unplanned development on the highlands have resulted in bare (and unstable) soil, causing mud floods during downpours.

"Irresponsible acts by certain quarters on the environment have caused the disaster, and it serves as a lesson to everyone. When we travel there, we can see that massive amounts of land have been cleared. Whether it was done with permission or illegally is another issue, but the main concern is our attitude towards conserving and managing the environment.

"I am not trying to shift the blame but that is the reality that we have to face," said Adnan.

Leong attributed the disaster to over-development and land clearing, besides the heavy rainfall.



Kampung Baru Ringlet villagers cleaning up their houses yesterday after their village was hit by the mud floods. Pic by Muhaizan Yahya

"A lot of development and land clearing have been going on for the past year, causing this disaster. While rainfall is unavoidable, development can be controlled."

He praised the authorities for carefully handling the release of water from the Sungai Abu Bakar Dam.

Natural Resources and Environment Minister and Cameron Highlands member of parliament Datuk Seri G. Palanivel, meanwhile, called for affected residents to be relocated to safer ground.

"I have spoken to the district officer to look for a suitable piece of land," he said during a brief visit to Dewan Ringlet, where some of the families were seeking shelter.

In a statement yesterday, TNB said its Emergency Response Plan had to be activated when water levels at the dam rose 2.1m an hour to 1,070m. The warning siren was sounded at 8.15pm to give people time to evacuate and the spillway gates were opened in stages, beginning at 8.40pm.

TNB said if the spillway gates had not been opened, the flooding would have been worse as all four gates would have opened automa-

tically if the water had risen to critical level.

Meanwhile, the search for possible victims of the floods, including an Indonesian man and his female compatriot who were reported missing after their *kongsi* in Bertam Valley was hit by a landslide, was called off last night because of soil movement. The search will continue today.

The dead were identified as farm workers Md Yousuf Miya, 66, of Nepal, Anipan, 48, of Indonesia and SMK Kampung Raja student R. Tunesh, 13.

Yousuf's body was found buried near his *kongsi* in Ulu Merah, Ringlet, at 8.30pm on Wednesday, while Anipan's body was found under 1m of earth in Bertam Valley at 9.20am yesterday.

Tunesh's body was found some 5km from where he was reported missing. **Additional reporting by Kalavaani Karupiah**

Page 1 pic: SJK (C) Bertam Valley is inundated in Wednesday's mud flood. Pic by Muhaizan Yahya

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Floods in Camerons

INFOGRAPHIC: NST

