

Plan to widen Sg Bertam under way

Upgrading of five bridges and new multi-purpose hall also in the works



Keen interest: Bertam Valley residents looking at a display on how the project to widen the river will be carried out.

By **AMANDA YEAP**

amandayeap@thestar.com.my

CAMERON HIGHLANDS: A plan to widen and deepen Sungai Bertam here is already in motion, said Pahang Public Amenities and Environment Committee chairman Datuk Mohd Soffi Abdul Razak.

He said the river, with an existing width of 6m and depth of 1.5m, would become 40m wide and 6.5m deep when the project was completed.

"There will also be concrete lining the riverbed to prevent soil erosion.

"In addition, five bridges across the river will be upgraded while a new multi-purpose hall for the people living in Bertam Valley will be constructed," he said during a meeting between the Pahang Drainage and Irrigation Department and residents yesterday.

Mohd Soffi said the contractor had acquired the land for the project on

Nov 21.

"However, we still have to settle the land issues involving five land owners and nine temporary occupancy licence (TOL) holders before the project can commence.

"It can be a difficult process as we need to convince them that this project is absolutely necessary for the residents' safety.

"We have issued notices to the legal owners and they will be given 21 days to move, whereas TOL holders will have their licence terminated by the end of the month," he said, adding that he hoped the project could proceed as planned by next month.

However, residents near Sungai Bertam had told Mohd Soffi of their fears that the project would affect their livelihood.

Among them was farmer Loh Mooi Hui, 58, who has been planting chilli in her 0.4ha farm with her grandfather since young.



River of change: Pahang Drainage and Irrigation Department officials surveying an area earmarked for the widening project. — Bernama

"I am worried because the widening project will take up at least half of my farm, which supports our family.

"I am afraid that I will not have enough to put food on the table after this," said the mother of seven and the farm's legal land owner.

Loh said any monetary compensation from the Government would not be sufficient to make up for the loss of half their farm.

"I would rather have a new piece of land," she added.

Another farmer, Tang Cheong Choon, 47, said he had been farming

for decades with a temporary occupancy licence.

"If the Government wants to reclaim the land for the project, what can I do but move," he said.

In response to the residents' concerns, Mohd Soffi said the Government would allocate RM1mil to compensate all five legal land owners.

"For those with a TOL, it has been clearly stated in the Land Acquisition Act during their application that the Government is not obligated to offer compensation should the need to terminate their licence arise.

"But consideration might be given to certain licence owners and all grievances should be channelled to the Cameron Highlands MP's office," he said.

Earlier last month, the town of Ringlet was inundated by a flash flood when Sungai Bertam overflowed after an hour of heavy rain, leaving five people dead and five injured.

The flood also affected 203 residents from 47 families in Kampung Baru and Lembah Bertam and they had to move to the Ringlet Community Hall.