

Three more areas illegally cleared

Electricity supply to be cut off and machinery seized under Ops Gading II

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CAMERON HIGHLANDS: Despite the curbs and the many efforts taken, several new areas here have been illegally opened up for farming, worsening what was already a bad situation.

National Security Council secretary Datuk Seri Alias Ahmad said the ongoing *Ops Gading* had found three new areas, involving some 7.28ha of land, that have been illegally cleared.

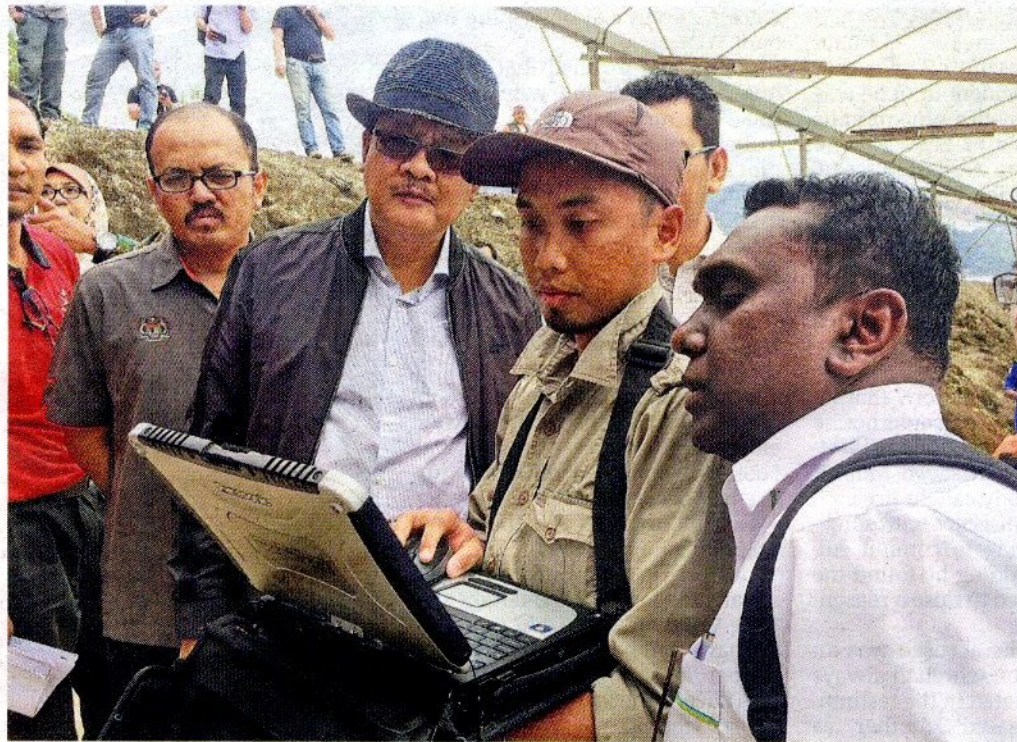
"These were found at Blue Valley and Bertam Valley.

"We have asked TNB to cut off the electric supply to these areas," he said after chairing an *Ops Gading* Phase II meeting at the district council here yesterday.

"We will seize the heavy machinery found at these illegally-cleared sites," he said, adding that the second phase of the operation, which began on March 3, would end on July 30.

Alias also said the Drainage and Irrigation Department had identified 26 areas along river reserves that have been encroached.

These areas, he said, included two areas in Sungai Mansion, four in Ringlet and one each at Kampung Raja and Bertam Valley.



Worrying situation: Alias (third from right) looking at a satellite imaging system of illegal farms in Cameron Highlands.

He added that existing operators or farmers were also returning to their illegally cleared land to continue their farming operations there.

"At least 83% of these illegal

farm sites were destroyed during the previous operation.

"Many farmers are returning to these sites. We will be taking action against them again," he added.

Alias said enforcement person-

nel had received threats from some people, including tontos, during the operation.

"There were verbal threats and bottle throwing. Some were shot at with darts.

"We will not view this lightly, although no one was hurt," he said.

Alias said this year's operation was on a smaller scale compared to the first one.

"It involves about 57 personnel from 18 agencies," he said.

Noting that the operation was aimed at preventing illegal clearing of land, Alias said it was also focused on curbing illegal immigrants.

"We are now adopting a softer approach to educate and to create awareness on preserving the environment, which is the main pull factor for the highlands as a tourism destination.

"There were also some foreign companies involved, financing some local farmers. We are still investigating that," he said.

"We will propose to the Companies Commission to blacklist them and the Immigration to bar them from entering the country," he added.

Alias said enforcement efforts were not a long-term solution to curb land clearing activities.

"This is why we are looking at using a soft approach.

"Education is the key. We want to create awareness among the people and farmers," he said.