

Another hillslope laid bare

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Massive clearing taking place at Teluk Bahang in Penang

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GEORGE TOWN: Unknown to many people here, massive clearing has been taking place over the years on a hillslope in Teluk Bahang near the dam, probably even without the knowledge of the authorities.

There is lush greenery on most sides of the site close to the Teluk Bahang dam but the said lot itself has been stripped bare.

A check by *The Star* showed quarrying activities taking place on the land.

Villagers in the Teluk Bahang fishing village are unaware of the barren tracts because the view from the main road is blocked by a hoarding and trees.

Teluk Bahang assemblyman Datuk Shah Headan Hussain Ayob Shah was also in the dark until he was alerted by *The Star* with information from Google Earth Pro.

A four-member team from the Penang Island City Council inspected the hillslope at about 9.30am yesterday.

The team which was led by an engineer known only as Hanafi declined to speak to the press.

The Star had tipped-off the council about the land clearing.

When contacted, a senior official said they were investigating the land clearing but he declined to elaborate.

The bald patch encompassing around 30ha is in front of the former Penang Mutiara Beach Resort which was abandoned.

The cleared hillslope, which is behind another plot of land along the main road where the Penang Regional Development Authority (Perda) is building a 13-storey hotel, is about one-third the size of the dam.

A Penang Water Supply Corporation Sdn Bhd officer said the hillslope was not part of the water catchment area.

The lowest point of the clearing is 23m above sea level and the highest point is 103m above sea level.



Ariel view: A screen capture from Google Earth showing the expanse of cleared land in Teluk Bahang.

It is learnt that the land belongs to a prominent tycoon from Kulim. He is believed to have a wide range of business activities here and overseas.

A source said that initially 10ha of the land was supposed to have been sold to a private university to set up a branch campus but the deal did not go through.

The source added that the tycoon may partner with a group of Chinese investors to build bungalows on the hillslope; the houses would have a magnificent view of the Teluk Bahang coast including the fishing village and the Penang National Park.

At the moment, there is a batik craft factory and Escape Theme Park along Jalan Teluk Bahang,

about 0.5km away from the cleared hillslope.

Shah Headan said he knew about the old quarry at the site and that Perda was building a hotel along the road but he "didn't know the area has undergone massive clearing."

He added that the quarry land was privately owned.

Sources said the quarry and surrounding land was sold to the tycoon some years ago.

Villagers living along the narrow road leading to the hillslope said the quarry had stopped its activities about 10 years ago.

"I believe someone bought the land. Lorries have been plying the narrow road by the kampung houses the past few years," said a villager.

It is not known whether the land-

owner has a permit for quarrying.

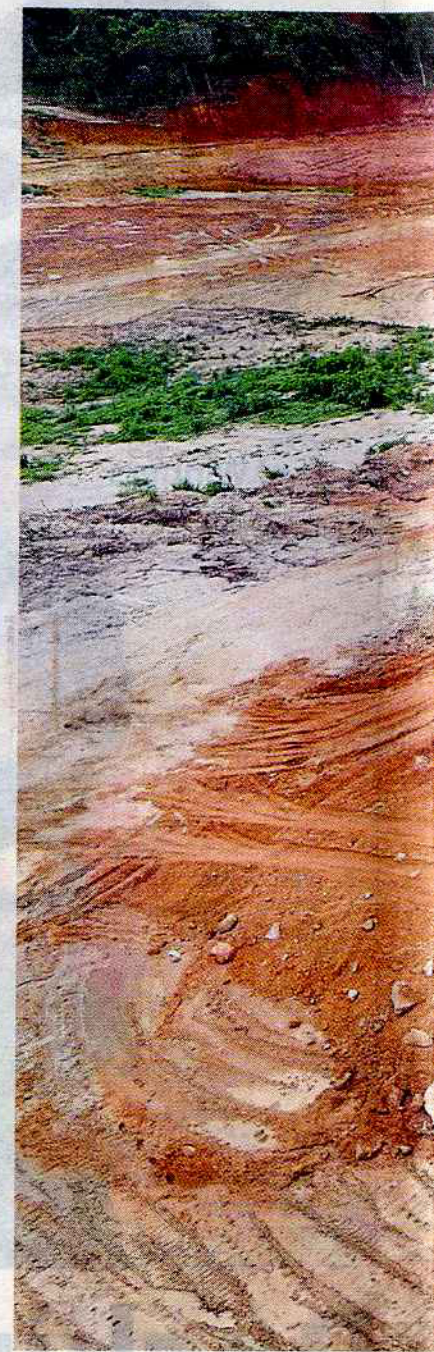
The licences are issued by the state Lands and Mines Office. Operators have to pay royalties for excavation works.

Council president Datuk Patahiyah Ismail and secretary Ang Aing Thye could not be reached for comment.

Consumers Association of Penang president SM Mohd Idris was shocked the land clearing has not detected by the authorities.

"The state government is emphasising a greener Penang. What direction are we heading to with bald patches cropping up everywhere?" he asked.

He said the bare hillslopes just showed that the authorities were lax on enforcement.



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