

Penang Forum warned state govt twice over Bukit Kukus

By **Predeep Nambiar** - October 19, 2018 11:42 PM

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GEORGE TOWN: A soil scientist who accurately predicted last year's intense floods and landslides in Penang as a result of hill development said today's landslide at a hill in Bukit Kukus that left two dead, one injured and 10 missing comes as no surprise.

The landslide crashed workers' cabins at the 5km Paya Terubong Bypass Road, being constructed by the city council and two other private developers at a cost of RM530 million.

Penang Forum steering committee member Kam Suan Pheng said the group had warned the state government and local authorities — twice — over Bukit Kukus and other areas in the state where hills are being cleared.

"We alerted them twice over the Bukit Kukus hillside clearing and the response we got from the state was 'this is a road and/or infrastructure construction' and the work is being 'monitored'.

Ad





Location : Paya Terubong

Approximate Coordinates : 5°21'48.0"N 100°16'33.8"E

Photo taken in Feb 2018.

Observation and comments

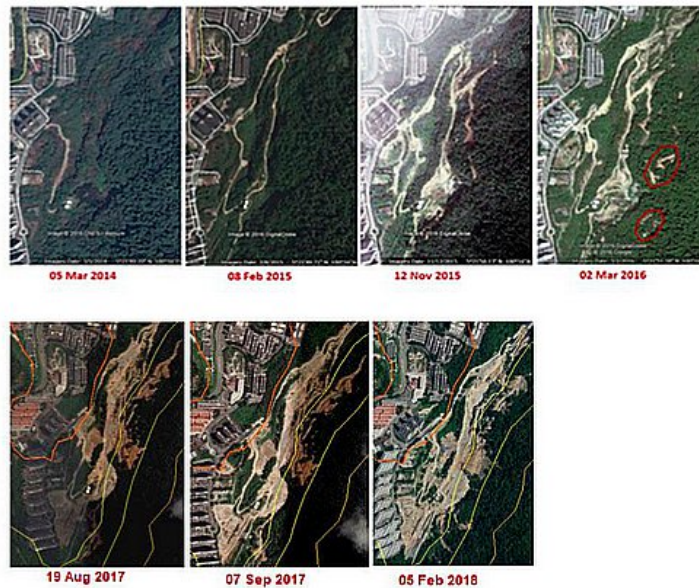
This is the same Bukit Kukus location as Report 12 in the First PHW report, to which MBPP response was that Report 12 refers to approved earth works and NBK issued to developer Sri & Sri Associates SB on 17 Jun 2014. It was pointed out in the Second PHW report that Google Earth images from Mar 2014 to Mar 2016 (the top 4 below) showed more extensive slope cutting.

The landslide site in Bukit Kukus reported by Penang Hills Watch. The report was sent to the Penang government last month.

"If they are monitoring, I am puzzled why such a landslide is happening," she said when met by reporters at the site Friday.

"I don't understand. Is infrastructure construction free from compliance? It's very tragic this landslide has occurred at almost the same area as last week."

She was referring to last Thursday's incident, where a crane operator lifting steel plates accidentally hit beams laid on the elevated road, causing 14 beams to roll down the hills. The authorities had then ordered the project to stop, pending a safety audit.



Additional Google Earth images from Aug 2017 to Feb 2018 (the bottom 4) show even more extensive hill clearing and exposed slopes for the construction of the Paya Terubong Paired Road, without any mitigation measures to prevent soil erosion. This site had been a major contributor of eroded soil being washed away with heavy rainfall runoff causing flooding of mud-laden waters all the way down the Sg Dondang-Sg Air Itam-Sg Pinang rivers on 04-05 November 2017

Further south towards the Relau area, more hill clearing activities (marked by the yellow polygons on the right in the Google Earth images below) are evident, comparing the December 2015 and February 2018 images.

No mitigation work to counter soil erosion says Penang Hills Watch. Pictures show various images from Google Earth showing a four-year period up to February this year.

Kam said Penang Forum had earlier sent two reports to the state highlighting the serious cuts on the hills at Bukit Kukus.

Kam said the hills have been cut for the past “two to three years and had been left exposed for a very long time, which is likely why the slope gave way”.

Kam explained the warnings were aplenty. She said the teh tarik-coloured waterfalls during last November’s major floods at the area was one sign that the soil from these cut hills was slowly being transported downwards to the streets and drains, weakening the cut slopes.



Feb 2018



Difference between situation in December 2015 (top) and February this year (bottom).

She said the authorities had only kept covering the cut hills with plastic or tarpaulin sheets. These would tear over a short period of time and were later replaced.

Kam said this was an exercise in futility as the hills could continue to lose stability over time as they were being exposed to the elements.

The NGO had launched the Penang Hills Watch (PHW) initiative, crowdsourcing platform that allows the public to report any hill clearing by submitting pictures and the location.

She said they had submitted hill-clearing reports to the state government, the local authorities (MBPP and MPSP), but the answer had always been the same — they are being monitored (“dalam pemantauan”).

“It is time for the authorities to pay more attention and take action to protect hill slopes. Now, as you see, it has again cost lives.”

A year ago, another landslide at the Tanjung Bungah construction site had buried 11 construction workers.

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