



Sahabat Alam Malaysia
Friends of the Earth Malaysia
For Environmental Justice

1, Jalan Joki, 11400 Penang, Malaysia
Tel No: +604 827 6930
Fax No: +604 827 6932
Email: foemalaysia@gmail.com
<https://www.foe-malaysia.org>

Letter to Editor

16 November 2020

**Tambun landslide tragedy:
Need to avoid projects in environmentally sensitive areas**

The landslide which struck the Sunway Group's Banjaran Hot Springs Retreat in Tambun, Perak, killing two guests on Monday, Nov. 9, once again reveals the need to avoid siting projects in environmentally sensitive areas.

It was good that the Perak state government ordered the relevant departments and agencies to monitor every risky limestone hill throughout the state, especially those located near residential areas, following the landslide tragedy.

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) looks forward to learning about the outcomes of these monitoring, in the public interest.

We also welcome Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Ahmad Faizal Azumu's order to close the Tambun resort until further notice, as the place is still at risk of further landslides.

As explained by the State Mineral and Geoscience Department (JMG), limestone hills have the potential to experience landslides or rock falls.

According to media reports, the JMG deputy director, Mat Niza Abdul Rahman had said that the resort is surrounded by limestone valley walls and due to a downpour, "the rains weakened the residual soil which collapsed onto a part of the villa where the victims stayed."

The JMG has also found out that there is still active water flow along the slope in the hill, which runs through the cracks. "Some of the limestone at the scene has already experienced high weathering and facilitated rock falls," explained the JMG director.

The Perak MB was reported to have told the media that checks with the Ipoh City Council revealed that the resort management had obtained necessary approvals, including the establishment of buffer zones, from all the relevant departments, before developing the place 20 years ago.

Clearly, this incident reveals that approvals by authorities do not necessarily guarantee the safety of buildings or structures for years to come, especially when they are located in or close to environmentally sensitive areas like limestone hills and other hillslopes and highlands, which are very prone to landslides/ landslips as we have witnessed many times in this country.

Most notable among them was the 1993 Highland Towers tragedy at Bukit Antarabangsa, that led to the collapse of three blocks apartments that saw the loss of close to 50 people.

The concerns over allowing construction in environmentally sensitive areas such as limestone hills and other hills/highlands become even more grave as we witness more intense, frequent and unprecedented rainfalls

due to climate change, that increase vulnerabilities and risks to soil movements, erosion, landslides and landslips.

It is vital that we pay heed to these tragedies and learn from them, and take the precautionary approach of avoiding construction in or close to environmentally sensitive areas.

As the saying goes, prevention is certainly better than cure!

Meenakshi Raman
President
Sahabat Alam Malaysia