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A stand-off with FRIM

A plant nursery owner is distraught when FRIM personnel attempts to evict him after he was found to be using forest reserve land. >4

'What I need is more time'

Nursery owner in Sg Buloh appeals to FRIM to delay eviction

Story and photo by VINCENT TAN
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THERE were tense scenes as Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) personnel attempted to evict the operator of an illegal plant nursery from its land in Bukit Lagong, Sungai Buloh.

Cheong Tong Seong, 67, even resorted to standing in front of the wheeldozer's blade in an attempt to prevent the demolition of his nursery shed yesterday morning.

Shouting "I rather die", Cheong said he had tried to meet FRIM director-general Datuk Dr Abd Latif Mohmod to seek a solution to the illegally occupied land but had been rebuffed.

"I respect you, so I do not just simply come in," Cheong told the D-G when Dr Abd Latif tried to explain that he was encroaching on FRIM land and had been given notice to vacate since July last year.

The distraught nursery owner said he had approached a former D-G about utilising the land, which was set aside as reserve land for power lines.

"This was back in 1986, and I had asked for something in black and white, but was told not to worry. I have no written proof to show that they allowed me to use the land," said Cheong.

Previously, he added, the nursery had taken up as much as 3.2ha of land.

"But I am getting old and will retire, so I reduced the lot to 0.97ha. I just need time to clear out my plants, it is not easy finding another place."

"There are bonsai saplings but nobody to take them," he lamented.

Cheong said he needed more time to clear the land completely.

He lost control of his emotions when the wheeldozer moved in to demolish the newly-built shed, and when the same vehicle towed away a water pump from a pond in the nursery.

After negotiations by the personal assistants of the Subang Jaya MP and Paya Jaras assemblyman, Cheong was given an additional 14-day grace period to move out, although the land would be under lock and key.

"We have managed to find a nursery which will take Cheong's plants but the shed and other man-made structures have been demolished.

"FRIM will be monitoring the situation. Cheong needs to call them first before coming into the area and he must show that he is moving his belongings out," said Mohtar Samat, the PA to Paya Jaras assemblyman Khairuddin Othman.

According to Dr Abd Latif, FRIM was granted title to the land Cheong had been operating on in July last year.

"We did a survey the same month and discovered that he had intruded onto our land.

"We sent the first notice on July 15 2012 for him to vacate," said Dr Abd Latif.

He added that as FRIM and its forest had been declared a National Heritage site, the statutory body had been allocated RM7mil to properly delineate and fence up the boundary around all 544.3ha of land.

Dr Abd Latif said FRIM had sent staff to survey the area and started building the fences last November.

Cheong had claimed FRIM would not listen to his plea to extend the period for him to vacate the land.

Dr Abd Latif said he and senior personnel from FRIM, had sat down with Cheong on June 14 this year to explain that he was intruding on their land and needed to vacate.

"In March, FRIM officers had verbally warned him not to put up new structures, but when we went to check on April 24, there was a new shed with a concrete base and walls," said Dr Abd Latif.

FRIM sent a second notice to Cheong on May 29, requesting he vacate the land in 14 days, followed by a third notice on June 19 warning Cheong of the planned demolition in a month's time.

While Cheong's nursery is the only business encroaching onto FRIM land, Dr Abd Latif said there were a few other illegal encroachments and FRIM would take action in due time.

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– MOHTAR SAMAT



Knocked down: The wheeldozer moving in to demolish the shed built by Cheong, which FRIM claims was built in April 2013 despite an eviction notice sent in July last year.



Stop!: Cheong (in striped T-shirt) holding on to the wheeldozer's blade in an effort to stop FRIM and police officers from entering his nursery at Bukit Lagong in Sungai Buloh.