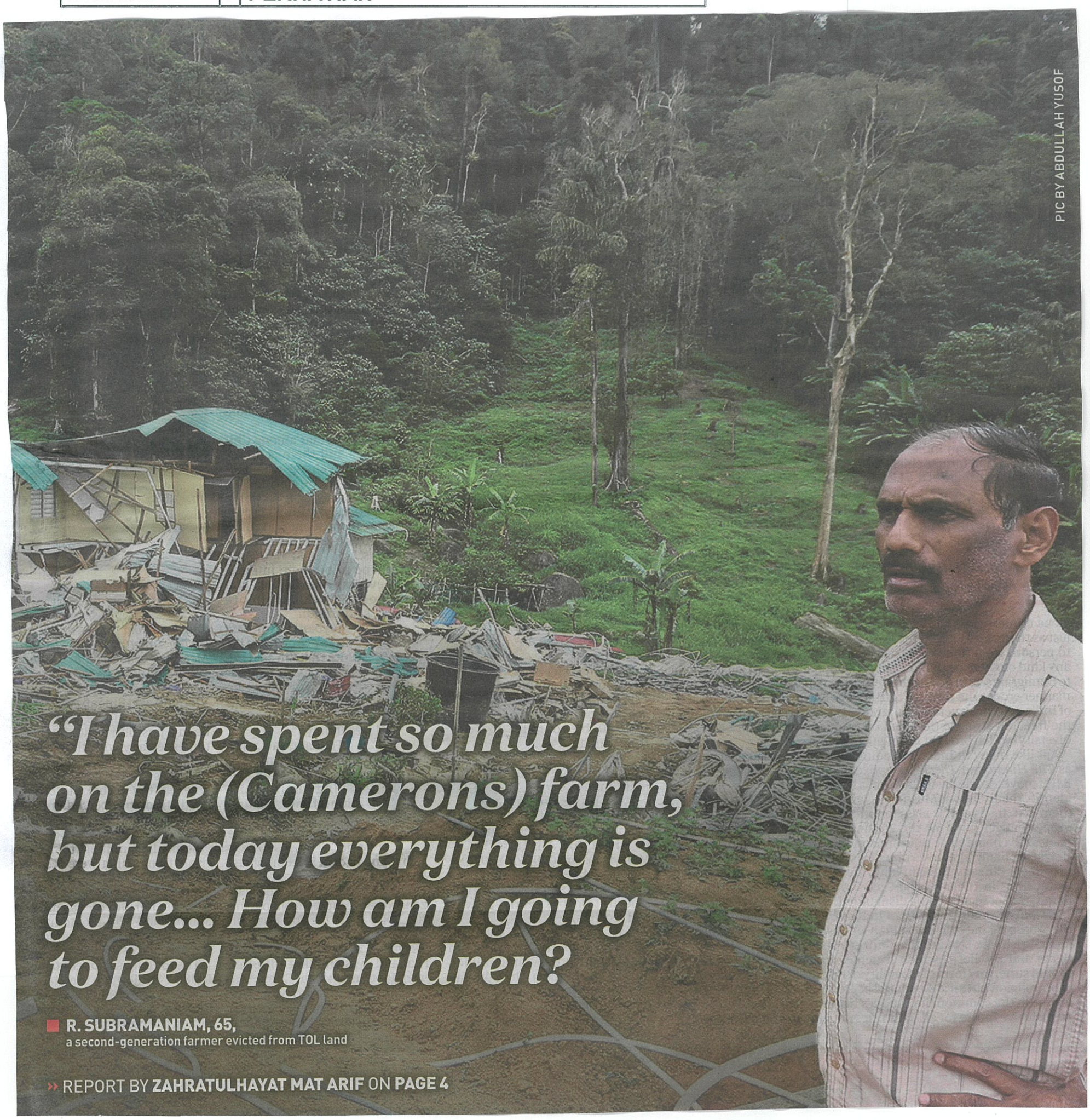
Unit Komunikasi Korporat

KERATAN AKHBAR

AKHBAR	:	NEW STRAITS TIMES			
TARIKH	:	30/12/2019	MUKA SURAT	:	1
JABATAN	:	UMUM			
KLASIFIKASI	:	**PERHATIAN**			



» REPORT BY **ZAHRATULHAYAT MAT ARIF** ON **PAGE 4**

Unit Komunikasi Korporat
KERATAN AKHBAR
AKHBAR : NEW STRAITS TIMES
TARIKH : 30/12/2019 MUKA SURAT : 4
JABATAN : UMUM
KLASIFIKASI : PERHATIAN

OP LESTARI 2

EVICTED FARMERS SEEK ALTERNATIVE SITE

They hope the state government will relocate their farms to new areas

ZAHRATULHAYAT MAT ARIF
CAMERON HIGHLANDS
zahratulhayat@nst.com.y

FARM owners evicted from the Kuala Terla water catchment area are pleading with the state government to find an alternative site for them.

About 70 per cent of the vegetable farms have been vacated up to yesterday. However, some of the 60 farmers, whose families have been growing vegetables there for 40 to 50 years, refused to budge. They hope the state government will relocate their farms to new areas where they can continue running their business.

R. Subramaniam, 65, a second-generation smallholder, said he had been working on the farm since it was opened by his late father in 1980.

"I have spent so much on the farm, but today everything is gone.

"My hard work comes to nothing. How am I going to repay my bank loan? How am I going to feed my children?

"The state government initially claimed that the temporary occupation licences (TOLs) of farmers in the area had expired in 2009, and that the farmers had enough time to leave the area after the eviction notices were issued.

"However, after further investigation, we realised that many farmers were allowed to renew their TOLs until last year," he said, adding that Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Wan Rosdy Wan Ismail never met the farmers to discuss the matter.

Another farmer, S. Mathan, 36, who operates a 2ha vegetable farm, said he had spent between RM30,000 and RM40,000 to remove the equipment.

"It is impossible to clean out everything in three days. We need at least two years. I had to rent a store that cost me RM1,600 per month.

"This is unfair. I have never expected my years of hard work to come to nought. Everything was destroyed.

"The state government should deal with the problem in a humane way by considering the livelihood of hundreds of farmers here and giving us a better way out.

"I decided to dismantle the equipment as some parts can be sold later and it can be reused should I have the opportunity to open a new farm later on."

Checks by the *New Straits Times* here yesterday showed farmers moving in and out of the farming area to remove their equipment as workers dismantled watering systems, pipes, plastic canopies, workers' quarters and water tanks.

Four-wheel drive vehicles laden with sheets of zinc, metals and other items were seen leaving and entering the farms.

On Friday, Wan Rosdy announced the suspension of enforcement against illegal farming in the Kuala Terla water catchment area for three days until Sunday, adding that it was an act of leniency on the part of the state government.

The enforcement operation — Op Lestari 2 — which is being conducted by the Cameron Highlands District and Land Office with the support of agencies including the National Security Council, is expected to be completed within a month.

Last week, state MIC chief V. Arumugam was reported as saying that a party team had gone to Kuala Terla on Dec 23 (the first day of Op Lestari 2) hoping that the farmers would be able to get an extension to collect their vegetables, fruits and flowers.

Launched on Dec 16, the operation comes after Op Lestari, which was aimed at restoring natural water sources, particularly Sungai Ichat which has been badly polluted due to illegal development of land for agriculture.



A worker tearing down an illegally-operated farm in Kuala Terla, Cameron Highlands, yesterday. PIC BY ABDULLAH YUSOF