

ENCROACHMENT

Landless village volunteers risk missing out on plots

POST REPORTERS

PHETCHABUN: Authorities are exploring legal channels to reclaim land plots allocated to landless “village volunteers” who helped the state fight the defunct Communist Party of Thailand in the mountainous areas of Khao Kho district in former times.

The owners of the plots are believed to have broken the land-use agreements.

The push came after prosecutors dropped charges last September against an owner of the land used by the so-called volunteers where three four-storey buildings are now located. The property is said to have been built for a resort. Prosecutors cited a lack of evidence for not indicting the owner. No appeal had been lodged as of press time yesterday.

Army officers searched the plot again in the middle of last month, believing the owner may have broken the land use agreement by constructing a resort there.

Lt Gen Phadung Yingpaiboonsuk, chief of the 1st Operations Coordination Centre under the Internal Security Operations Command (Isoc); Attapon Charoenchansa, deputy director-general of the Royal Forest Department; and other relevant officials held a meeting on Thursday to find ways to deal with the plots used by the volunteers that are suspected of having broken the agreements.

Lt Gen Phadung said the meeting was

held to settle confusion over the cases, adding that “a regulation has been put in place”.

Mr Attapon held another meeting with Chit Intharanok, chief of the Phetchabun Forest Coordination Centre, and other forestry officers in Khao Kho to follow up on the case of three giant buildings situated in the Ban Sungkhum forest reserve in tambon Khao Kho. They reportedly discussed legal issues that would arise if the case were revived.

According to sources at the meeting, forestry officials were instructed to compile all of the evidence linked to 61 disputed land cases at that location. Of them, 27 have been dropped.

Mr Attapon instructed officials to follow up on the consequences the prosecution’s move would likely have, rather than just wrapping up the case quickly.

They will end their work only after they have helped deal with the suspected land encroachers, the sources said.

Forestry officers were also instructed to examine the way in which investigators had dismissed cases so that ways could be found to plug such loopholes in the future.

They said 135 resorts had been found on the land belonging to the volunteers, with another 169 in the forest zone.

Most of the resorts have lawyers with sufficient legal knowledge to fight such cases, the sources added.

Meanwhile, an 81-year-old man, La-or Jinjaitrong, claimed he owned the land where the three giant buildings were located.

He said that in the past he had served as one of the volunteers, resulting in the land being allocated to him in 1984.

He said he was aware of the conditions facing the volunteers.

He now receives a monthly payment of 10,000 baht from the investors, based on the contract, he said, adding he had earned the money for nearly a year.

Once the resort is open, he was promised a higher salary.

About 100 million baht may have been invested in the three buildings.