



KERATAN AKHBAR



KHBAR	:	NEW STRAITS TIMES
TARIKH	:	5/1/2017
JABATAN	:	NRE / BAUXITE / JMG / BMG
KLASIFIKASI	:	PERHATIAN



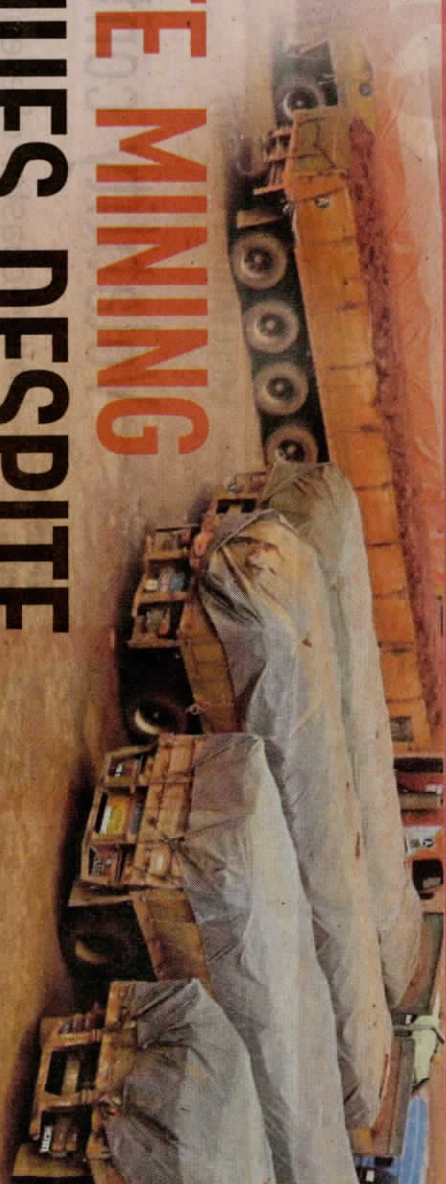
HIDIR REDUAN

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ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE

BAUXITE MINING CONTINUES DESPITE MORATORIUM

The remaining bauxite stockpile is damaging oil palm estates and forests



Clearing of the remaining bauxite stockpiles must be done immediately in light of the state government's push to attract tourists as part of Visit Pahang 2017. FILE PIC

THE decision by the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry to extend by three months, until March 31, the moratorium on bauxite mining in Pahang indicates how much environmental damage the activity has caused.

The announcement on Dec 22 is particularly enlightening due to the fact that a day earlier, Minister Datuk Seri Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar had gone on an aerial tour of the mining sites in Kuantan and on that same day, declared to the press that he was satisfied with the environmental situation there.

Conceding that he had seen bauxite ore at abandoned mining sites — which is an indication that fresh mining of the mineral is still going on (which contravenes the moratorium) or that uncleared stockpiles were left behind by legitimate miners — Junaidi vowed that the ministry would work with agencies like the police and Civil Defence Department to nab culprits.

His later announcement for the further extension of the moratorium

was followed by him taking pains to emphasise that it was to allow legitimate miners to clear the stockpiles rather than as a response to the alleged fresh mining.

Any remaining bauxite stockpile at mining sites like Felda Bukit Kuantan are environmental hazards to surrounding oil palm trees and forests, and have to be cleared out properly as soon as possible. The hazardous nature of the stockpiles were experienced first-hand by a team from the *Neo Straits Times* who visited an area that was allegedly freshly mined, deep in the interior of a oil palm estate in Felda Bukit Kuantan, where rain splashed red mud down the bare hills and slopes.

The scene was reminiscent of 2015, where red bauxite dust hung in the air and settled on streetlights, pavements and signboards near mining sites and roads connecting the mines and Kuantan Port, where US\$1 billion (RM4.5 billion) worth of the mineral is shipped out, mostly to China.

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with many describing it as a "journey to Mars". The planet's rocky and sandy red-stained environment inspired the ancient Greeks to link the planet with their God of War, Ares.

The owner of an eatery affected by the red dust in early January last year had complained that her business suffered because she did not want to serve "dust" to customers. Clearing of the remaining bauxite stockpiles must be done immediately in light of the state government's push to attract tourists as part of Visit Pahang 2017, a prospect that hinges on the ironic need for cleanliness of ecotourism sites like Pantai Cherating, Balok and Sungai Lembing.

Malaysian Nature Society (MNS), vice-chairman Noor Jehan Abu Bakar rightly noted that this dream of attracting visitors to the state might not materialise if the roads to ecotourism sites were caked in red bauxite dust.

He said residents of Kampung Selamat, near Kuantan Port, suffered mud floods of bauxite deposits when it rained early last month, which was puzzling due to the supposed mas-

sive cleanup during the moratorium. This is a valid concern due to the risks of heavy rain during the monsoon season, which is expected to last until March. Massive floods are already affecting neighbouring Terengganu and Kelantan. Prolonged rain could cause the remaining bauxite stockpiles to bleed into the earth and rivers, poisoning them and further complicating efforts by agencies like the Land and Mines Office to ensure mining operators complied with the moratorium.

As on-and-off rains pelt Pahang and reports of empty former mining sites coming alive at night with illicit mining, it is imperative that the federal and state governments, its agencies, stakeholders and residents get their act together and cooperate to clean up any remaining stockpile.

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