



KEMENTERIAN TENAGA DAN SUMBER ASLI

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Gunung Jerai floods an act of God, says minister

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► 'No logging was carried out since area was declared a geopark and gazetted as a forest reserve'

KUALA LUMPUR: The floods in Gunung Jerai, Kedah last month was the will of the Almighty.

In explaining his rationale for this statement, Energy and Natural Resources Minister Datuk Seri Takiyuddin Hassan said there had not been any logging activities in the area since it was declared a national geopark and gazetted as a forest reserve.

"What happened (has to be) an act of God, given that logging is no longer carried out in the Ulu Muda Forest Reserve."

In response, Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim scoffed at his logic, pointing out that rather than an act of God, it could have been the result of the "greed of humans" who have ruined the reserve.

Takiyuddin was responding to a question from Sabri Aziz (Jerai-PAS) when he made the statement. Sabri had wanted to know what the ministry would do to restore the area that is now still considered unsafe.

Takiyuddin said that from 2014 to 2019, approval for logging activities had been granted only in 25,000ha of forests in Kedah. However,

no approval has been given for logging in the Ulu Muda Forest Reserve, including near Gunung Jerai.

"I was there myself (during the floods) and I watched trees with their roots still intact being carried away by the water. This shows that there were no logging activities but it was an act of God."

He pointed out that Gunung Jerai is located in the 160,000ha Ulu Muda Forest Reserve where logging is allowed in 88% of the forest area, leaving 12% as a protected area.

He said the forest will be replanted under a RM75 million restoration plan. Also covered under the plan is Gunung Jerai.

In August, a massive deluge hit the Gunung Jerai area, forcing nearly 1,000 families to evacuate. Four people were killed in the floods, described as a "small tsunami".

Kedah Menteri Besar Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor has also refuted allegations that the floods were caused by logging activities.

Takiyuddin said that in 2019, approval for logging in a 43,299ha area was granted under

the annual cut ration, but only 10,949ha had been logged.

Last year, approval was granted for logging in 39,345ha of forest land but only 22,931ha had been logged.

Anwar said that illegal logging is not a new issue. "This problem has been around for many years despite all the laws to curb the illegal activities. My question is why is logging allowed to continue despite the fact that it causes floods."

He then cited the fact that the grounds where Universiti Utara Malaysia was eventually built was already stripped of its forests while the authorities were unaware.

"This should not happen again. There has to be strong political will to curb this."

In acknowledging that illegal logging had been going on for years, Takiyuddin said it is impossible for the government to stop it altogether but it can be minimised.

"The government is serious about this and I accept the suggestion by the opposition leader that more political will is necessary to address the situation. However, it also needs the cooperation of all quarters, including contractors, developers and the private sector."

Takiyuddin said that as of July 31 last year, a total of 26 cases of illegal logging were recorded in Peninsular Malaysia, 37 cases in Sabah and 93 in Sarawak.