

## KERATAN AKHBAR

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## PROTECTING FORESTS

## PAHANG GETS TOUGH ON ILLEGAL MINERS

State govt mulls harsher penalties, stricter mining guidelines to curb problem

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**T**HE Pahang government plans to mete out harsher punishments and implement stricter mining guidelines in the state. Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Wan Rosdy Wan Ismail said protecting the environment continued to be his priority and enforcement operations would be boosted to support this.

Wan Rosdy called out to the public to be the eyes and ears of the authorities to protect forests

reserves from being encroached on.

"Although there are agencies assigned to protect and control forests from being intruded, we need residents to play their role too.

"Together, we should be proactive in dealing with mining and protect forests against deforestation and illegal logging," he said, adding that mining was carried out not only for gold but also other minerals and materials.

He said five joint-enforcement operations had been carried by agencies until last month.

The operations included Op Tanglung, from Jan 29 to 31, which led to the arrest of five people and imprisonment of one person, as well as Op Lombong 4.0 from April 1 to 4 in Lipis, which saw the arrest of seven people.

The Malaysian Nature Society has questioned the effectiveness of the enforcement operations in protecting forest reserves in Pa-

hang and other states.

It vice-president, Vincent Chow Kok Kow, said some people had taken advantage of the weaknesses in the enforcement system, which explained why forests could be encroached on by illegal gold miners.

"The authorities say they have been conducting daily patrols, but how is it that nobody knows about the illegal mining activities in the forest until everything is gone? If there are patrols, such an activity should not be happening."

Chow said a lack of manpower should not be the excuse when it came to protecting forests.

"This is a human factor. If we fail to protect our forests, the

ecosystem will be destroyed."

He said conservation efforts would mean little if land clearings and poaching continued.

Chow, who specialises in biodiversity, urged state governments to establish a technical committee for forests and wildlife protection consisting of experts.

He said it should carry out a periodic review on the status of forests and wildlife every six months to have a clear picture of the situation and identify solutions.



Datuk Seri Wan Rosdy Wan Ismail

He said annual reports by the authorities, such as the Forestry Department and Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Departments, did not provide details of the situation.

"An independent group of ex-

perts will ensure transparency by sharing their knowledge, which should also be shared with the public."

Chow highlighted the need for government agencies to work together in protecting forests, land and water resources.

"We need to question ourselves if we are doing things right. Should we be sticking with the same ideas or look at new ones that are more sustainable for the future? The Malaysian Nature Society is worried, but there is hope."

The *New Straits Times* yesterday, had reported that gold miners have been extracting gold nuggets worth nearly half a million ringgit from several areas in the Tersang forest reserve in Raub, Pahang.

State Forestry Department director Datuk Dr Mohd Hizamri Mohd Yasin was quoted as saying that four illegal gold mining sites were discovered last year and two this year.

