



KERATAN AKHBAR

AKHBAR	:	THE STAR		
TARIKH	:	7/10/2019	MUKA SURAT	: 17
JABATAN	:	PERHILITAN		
KLASIFIKASI	:	PERHATIAN		

Step up to protect wildlife

MANY Malaysian animals are going to be extinct if no drastic steps are taken to protect them from poaching. The problem is also part of wildlife trafficking, which takes place in all regions of the world, and countries with high biodiversity like Malaysia are the source, transit areas and hubs for smuggled species.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has estimated the global wildlife trafficking industry to be worth between US\$7bil (RM28bil) and US\$23bil (RM92bil) annually.

According to a 2016 report by the Wildlife Justice Commission, Kuala Lumpur is the easiest port to move illegal wildlife.

The report also revealed that it costs traffickers 50% less to move contraband through KLIA and KLIA2 compared to Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport.

On Sept 25, *The Star* carried an exclusive report revealing that as many as a dozen police officers are connected to syndicates smuggling pangolins across the Malaysia-Thailand border, "Going extinct by corruption" (Sept 25). The report triggered an investigation by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC).

We must remember that such illegal activities are significant contributors to biodiversity loss and species extinction.

There is an urgent need to review all existing laws, especially legislation pertaining to animal poaching, to curb the illegal activities that could reduce the number of our



Photo: Sabah Wildlife Department

wildlife particularly the endangered species.

The government should expedite its plan to amend the Wildlife Conservation Act 2010 to imprison poachers for more than 10 years and fine them up to RM5mil upon conviction. It is timely in view of the rampant poaching cases that threaten our protected species.

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) has also said that without serious action, the already critically small population of various wildlife such as the Bornean pygmy elephant (*pic*) would suffer the same fate as the Sumatran rhino.

Despite harsher punishments and improved wildlife enforcement capabilities under the new Act, poaching numbers continue to increase. SAM believes this is due to the absence of arrests of high-level individuals connected with these seizures.

The government should therefore consider mandatory imprisonment not only for poachers but also those convicted of abetting the culprits.

We must also take into account the police's recommendation for mandatory whipping of criminals involved in wildlife smuggling, and tighten conditions for the issuance of firearms licences and hunting permits.

As for enforcement of the law, the government should strengthen collaboration among the enforcement agencies by, among others, increasing the number of military or police personnel to check and prevent poaching activities in our forests.

We should not allow more species to face the same fate as the Sumatran rhino, which is already extinct in the wild.

Greater public awareness, better law enforcement and stronger political will are needed to not only pre-

vent poaching activities and illegal wildlife trade but also to avoid over-exploitation of natural resources.

Protecting wildlife and our nature's treasure trove is not only the responsibility of the enforcement agencies but also requires collaboration among NGOs, government agencies, corporate stakeholders and local communities.

We must take immediate action to help conserve our biodiversity, which includes more than 15,000 species of flowering plants, 1,500 species of terrestrial vertebrates and about 150,000 species of invertebrates.

Despite our hectic schedules and quest to become a developed nation, it is necessary for us to pause and ask what we need to do to deal with the multiple environmental threats that could wipe out our precious biodiversity.

We must stress on human behavioural change to help stop wildlife trade and roadkill. For the relevant laws to succeed, there must be public education and awareness efforts to encourage the public to fight wildlife exploitation.

Efforts to protect our wildlife are also in line with the theme of this year's Earth Day celebration, "Protect Our Species", which was celebrated on April 22. It is intended to educate and raise awareness about the accelerating rate of extinction of the planet's various species of fauna and flora.