

Forestry Dept: 'If there's no proof of corrupt practices, how can we take action?'

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A file pic shows illegal logging activities busted by authorities. - NSTP file pic

KUALA LUMPUR: The Forestry Department of Peninsular Malaysia has urged those with information on corrupt practices of its personnel who are involved in illegal logging to come forward.

Its director-general Datuk Mohd Ridza Awang said the department viewed the claims made by the environmental groups over the matter seriously.

"We never compromise when it comes to illegal logging and misconduct of our personnel.

"We at the department are taking an open approach to this issue. Should anyone have information of a pact between our personnel and illegal loggers, they can come forward and report it to us.

"But, with such a sweeping statement, it will only give a bad perception towards government agencies. If there is no proof of corrupt practices, how can we take action?"

"The same goes with the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission and relevant enforcement agencies, they cannot take action without evidence to support claims of such practices," he said when contacted.



Forestry Department of Peninsular Malaysia director-general Datuk Mohd Ridza Awang. - NSTP file pic

Ridza, however said the department appreciates the efforts taken by non-governmental organisations and the public who have been the eyes and ears of the authorities to protect the forests from being encroached.

He said the department, through its integrity unit, periodically conducted various programmes to strengthen the integrity of its personnel, especially for those on the ground.

Yesterday, environmental groups claimed corruption within government agencies who have been entrusted with protecting the forests, as the root cause behind the high number of illegal logging cases recorded every year.

Among the main agencies they red-flagged was the Forestry Department.

Centre for Environment, Technology and Development Malaysia (Cetdem) chairman Gurmit Singh said the high number of illegal logging activities in Malaysia was nothing new, nor was it surprising.

He also said that the number of cases might be higher as not all were reported or identified, while attributing the main cause of illegal logging to corruption within the Forestry Department.

Earlier in the Dewan Rakyat, Natural Resources, Environment and Climate Change Minister Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad said Malaysia recorded 90 cases of illegal logging last year, of which 60 were in Sarawak alone.

He said Perak recorded the second highest number of cases at 11 while Kelantan was close behind with 10, followed by Sabah with four, Selangor with two and one each in Johor, Pahang and Negri Sembilan.

Nik Nazmi said the criminals involved have been charged under the National Forestry Act 1984 in Peninsular Malaysia and the Forest Ordinance 2015 in Sarawak and the Forest Enactment 1968.

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