

Illegal miners outnumber legal ones

STARTLING: Only 36 of 236 sites mined for bauxite sanctioned by Pahang govt

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AS authorities probed deeper into the systems applied in the Pahang bauxite-mining industry, a startling finding has revealed that the number of those sanctioned to dig up land for the mineral paled in comparison to those actually doing it right under the noses of the state government.

It has emerged that only 36 of the 236 sites mined for bauxite were legal. This means that for every one legal mining site being excavated for the mineral, there are at least six illegal ones being dug up.

A source within the state, privy to ongoing checks to the systems, in revealing this, also told the *New Straits Times'* Special Probes Team that there had been suggestions of the presence of certain individuals who would buy the illicit stocks from

these illegal miners and facilitate their export to China.

They said these illegal miners had no problems tearing up bauxite-rich land in Kuantan, which they secured from landowners, hoping to make millions by leasing out their parcels for the precious content to be extracted.

The source said transporting the illicit cargo to the ports would also be a relatively easy affair as there were more than enough lorries on standby to make as many trips as needed to stockpile areas, and the port.

They said in the early days when the mining industry was picking up, there were agents who would connect these illegal miners to lorry operators to facilitate the transportation of the illicitly extracted material.

"After that, it was all smooth-sailing for everyone dealing with bauxite mining and its export," the source said.

Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar, on Thursday, revealed to the team that to his knowledge, at least 1,200ha of land in Kuantan had been dug up for bauxite by legal and illegal miners without the crucial measures that could have helped with rehabilitation once mining ceased.

The NST team reported that between January and November last



A bauxite stockpile area near the Kuantan Port. The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission has outlined recommendations to the Pahang government to tighten procedures on bauxite-mining activities in the state. Pic by Zulkepli Osman

year, Kuantan Port Consortium Sdn Bhd, which manages the shipment of the minerals to China, exported no less than 27 million tonnes of bauxite. Between October and last month, some 10 million tonnes of bauxite left the port.

"These thieves will normally gather their harvests in 'legal areas' before transporting the minerals to the port," the source said.

"There was practically no or very little enforcement where officers go down to check what exactly is going on. All we hear is the issuance of summonses to transporters, which, of course, had been largely ignored and merely filed away."

Pahang Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob, at a press conference on Jan 6 to announce a three-month moratorium on all bauxite-related activities in Kuantan, said last year, the state earned RM47 million from bauxite export royalty. This is just an RM10 million increase from the RM37 million revenue it earned in the first half of the year.

"Someone must be held responsible for what happened in Kuantan. This (the existence of illegal miners)

is mainly the result of either the state government's lackadaisical attitude or its agencies choosing to close one eye on the wrongdoings that had led to not only serious losses in revenue but also severe environmental degradation," the source said.

Meanwhile, other sources told the NST team that the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) had outlined eight recommendations to the state government to tighten procedures on bauxite-mining activities in Pahang.

The sources also told the team that the recommendations could greatly address loopholes in the existing system, including ensuring that the state Land and Mines Department (PTG) had better control over the issuance of the 13D form, also known as a "docket", which had to be kept inside lorries transporting minerals.

The form contains information on the volume of earth a lorry is allowed to carry per trip, from a specific area.

"Currently, companies with approved permits could apply for as

many dockets as they want.

"Some had abused the system by securing extra dockets and going beyond the specified areas.

"The department will need to limit the issuance of these dockets according to the size and the projected volume of the bauxite in the area. This will help the state to better control its bauxite-mining sector," the sources said.

It is understood that MACC would recommend for the PTG to specify in the permits issued to bauxite-mining companies the kinds of bauxite they would be transporting out of the mines.

"There is also a need for the PTG to specify the type of bauxite that is being transported in the permit, whether it is in the form of mineral, laterite soil or pisolites (small red pebbles).

"This will enable law enforcement officers to take action under specific laws related to land, mineral and earth resources," the sources said, adding that it was understood that the commission would discuss the recommendations with the PTG this week.

