

Miners: We've not been told to stop

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BAUXITE BLUES:

Operators want govt to give them grace period to clear stockpiles before imposing ban

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MINERS are prepared to stop their activities if the government imposes a ban on bauxite mining.

State Iron Ore Operators Association president Tengku Datuk Seri Zulkifli Tengku Ahmad said until such decision was made, "business will go on as usual".

He said the association had also yet to receive any instruction from the federal or state government about the future of mining activities despite widespread rumours of a three-month suspension on bauxite operations.

"If the government imposes a ban, we will then adhere to the ruling.

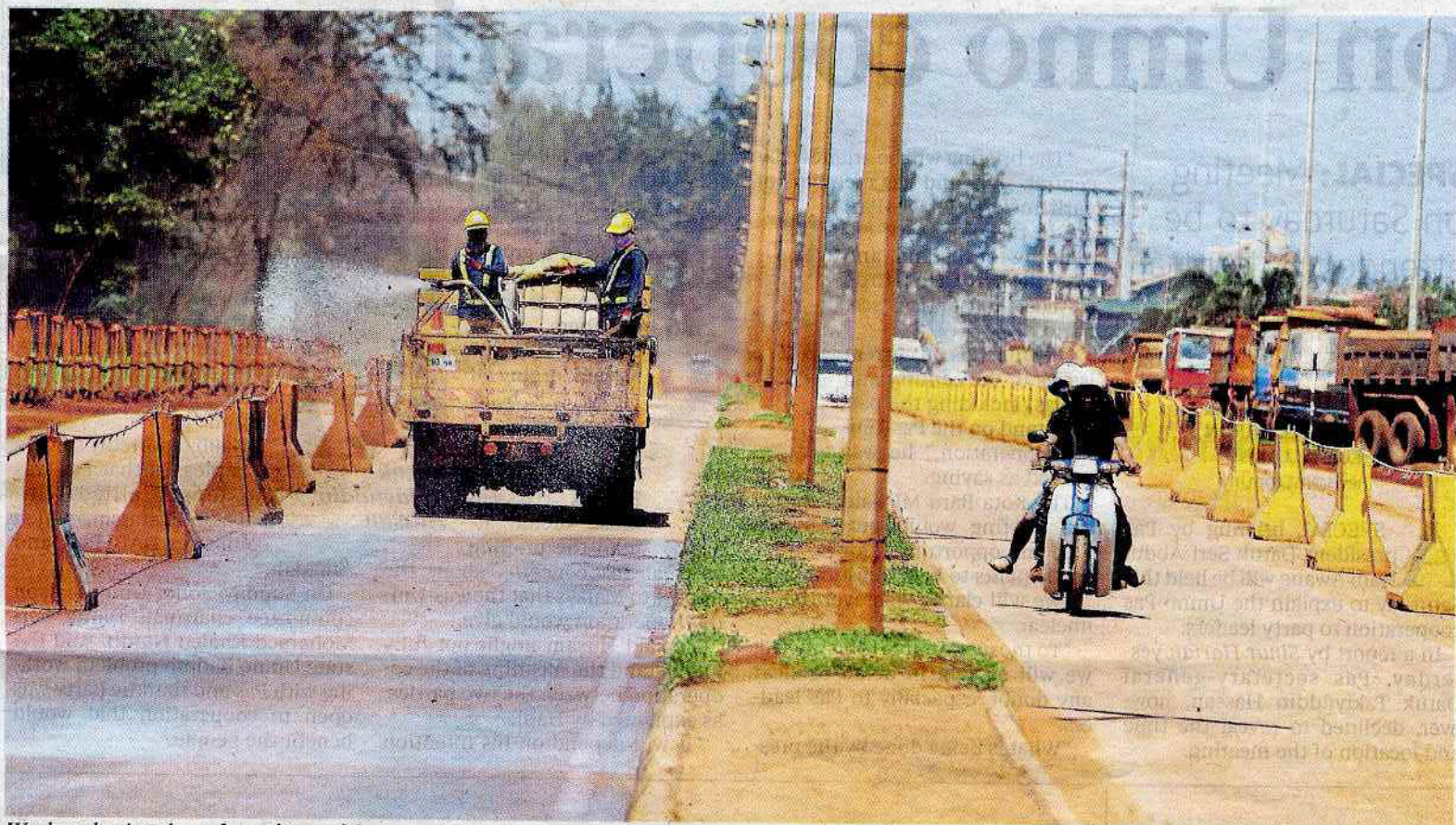
"However, a ban will have an impact on the operators, especially those who have signed long-term deals to export bauxite," he said yesterday.

Zulkifli said beginning on Dec 1, the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry had frozen the issuance of permits to export bauxite.

At present, he said operators were working together to transport bauxite stockpiles to waiting vessels at Kuantan Port.

Bukit Goh Bauxite Coordinating Committee chairman Datuk Dr Abd Wahid Abd Manap said the federal and state governments should provide operators a grace period to clear their bauxite stockpiles before imposing a ban.

"They cannot do it (ban) overnight.



Workers hosing down bauxite residue near Kuantan Port yesterday. Pic by Luqman Hakim Zubir

"Operators should be given between three and six months to complete their existing projects and clear their mining sites before the ban can take effect."

He said the authorities should introduce a new standard operating procedure for mining activities and devise solutions to tackle pollution problems.

He said the presence of errant and illegal miners had tarnished the image of the industry and provoked anger among the people who were affected by air, land and water pollution.

"The state government has on several occasions reminded and introduced various measures but some operators ignore them."

A source from the ministry said officers from several departments were occupied with meetings and exchanging information yesterday.

before an announcement on the future of bauxite mining is made today.

"The decision can either be a temporary or permanent ban on mining activities in Pahang.

"Any decision taken by the ministry would be based on views of all concerned parties," said the source.

Another source linked to the mining activities said it would be unfair to the operators if the government imposed a total ban.

He said the ministry had stated before that it would review existing laws to have tighter controls and stiffer penalties on errant bauxite operators.

"The ministry also stated then

that some improvements could be made to set a benchmark for other mining areas to follow."

Efforts to get comments from state government officials including Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob yesterday were futile as they did not respond to calls and queries through short-messaging service.

Kuantan Port plans to ensure cleaner surroundings

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NOR AIN MOHAMED RADHI

KUANTAN: Kuantan Port Consortium (KPC) Sdn Bhd is waiting for an official notice from either the state or Federal Government on the future of bauxite mining here.

KPC chief operating officer Datuk Khasbullah A. Kadir said if the government issued a temporary suspension on bauxite mining any time from now, the port would step up the cleaning-up process of its surroundings.

"If the suspension is for three months, we will use the time to clear the port area of the bauxite dust and residue," he said here yesterday.

Khasbullah said the company spent about RM1 million on cleaning work at the port every month.

"We do not mind spending money on cleaning as long as we can help minimise the impact on the environment and public," he said, adding that the port handled about 3.5 million metric tonnes of bauxite every month.

On a related matter, he refuted claims that the recent "red phenomenon" that occurred last week near Balok and Batu Hitam beaches was caused by bauxite stockpiles from the port.

He said the port had taken measures by filtering the water in its drainage system before it was channelled to nearby Sungai Pengorak that flowed into the sea.

Besides, he said Sungai Pengorak, had no links with Sungai Balok and Sungai Tonggak which were not far from Batu Hitam beach.

"If we look at the picture taken on Dec 29, Sungai Pengorak was not as badly affected as Sungai Balok and Sungai Tonggak although it was slightly dirty after three of our water filters broke due to heavy rains."

Khasbullah said it was unfair to put the blame on KPC for the phenomenon as the company had done its utmost to minimise the impact.

"Any individuals who want to give comments over the incident must

come out with facts. Please do not mislead the public."

Khasbullah said KPC would introduce a conveyor belt system to transfer bauxite from stockpile sites to vessels to reduce spillage and pollution.

He said the system, costing RM120 million, could reduce pollution between 60 and 80 per cent when it was utilised by the end of the year.

"There will be no more lorries traversing the port to carry bauxite from stockpile sites when the new system is used. Bauxite spillage will be reduced," he said.

In August last year, the *New Straits Times* published a series of articles highlighting the issue of environmental deterioration and toxic contamination of water from bauxite residue in Sungai Pengorak.

Independent laboratory tests, commissioned by the NST, had shown that the water samples contained high levels of heavy metals and traces of radioactive elements, which are hazardous to humans.



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