

Think of danger to the environment

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I HAVE been reading local and foreign reports about Malaysian companies bidding to export sand to India in large amounts. On paper, it all looks fine and dandy as there would be huge amounts of capital inflow into the country.

But here is the frightening part. The companies are looking at exporting 600,000 tonnes of river sand to the sand-starved Indian states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu each month, according to news reports in India.

That works out to a staggering 7.2 million tonnes of river sand being dug from our rivers each year. This indeed is scary.

The sudden demand for sand in India is due to the effective enforcement by the current government there in wiping out illegal sand mining which had been going

on for decades. The crackdown has affected the booming building industry so the powers that be are turning to Malaysia and Cambodia for quick and cheap sand imports. It is sad that we are lumped with Cambodia as it reflects how easy it is to obtain sand from us.

According to geological studies, riverbed mining causes several changes to the physical characteristics of both river and riverbed.

These can severely impact the ecological equilibrium of a river and damage the plant and animal habitats.

Excessive pumping out of groundwater during sand mining, especially in abandoned channels, generally results in depletion of groundwater resources, which would affect irrigation and potable

water availability.

The Supreme Court of India ruled in 2012 that an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) approval notification is needed for all sand mining and gravel collection activities in the country.

This raises an important question in Malaysia. Have these bids been approved by our Natural Resources and Environment Ministry? Is the ministry even aware of such a plan? Would these companies be subjected to an EIA or are the authorities putting economic and financial interests above the possible destruction of our environment?

I appeal to the relevant authorities to give Malaysians an answer.

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