



Villagers of Kampung Cherok Meranti cleaning up a water tank polluted by mud and red soil allegedly caused by logging activities. (Inset) The logging site at the Gunung Bongsu reserve forest.

Villagers mourn loss of clean water, income

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KULIM: A small village near here has been enjoying natural mineral water from a nearby hill for more than 20 years.

They enjoyed the water so much that they didn't need the chlorinated piped water supplied by the government.

They even have their own piping system to supply water for drinking and irrigating their farms.

The authorities had let them be with their natural resource.

Now, two logging companies, with logging permits at the Gunung Bongsu reserve forest — the source of the clean water — have allegedly caused the water to be polluted.

Representatives from 30 families in Kampung Cherok Meranti, Mahang, about half

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an hour's drive to Baling, lodged reports at the Kulim district police station on Sunday.

The villagers claimed that the water had been contaminated by the logging activities since September.

They also said that constant downpours early this month brought down red soils into the village, destroying farms and fish ponds and damaging some houses.

Kampung Cherok Meranti Village Development Committee chairman Samsul Md Arif Mat Saad said the total losses were estimated at RM150,000.

"Our income is badly affected, particularly for those who own vegetable and fruit farms, fish ponds and rubber trees," he said.

Another villager, Mohamad Ariffin Yaakob, said water

from the hill was heavily polluted and could affect their health.

According to police, they were investigating the matter and had referred to the Forestry Department for further action.

An official with the South Kedah Forestry Department here confirmed that the two companies had permits to operate at Gunung Bongsu.

He said the department had granted logging areas of 4.4 hectares and 11.68 hectares respectively to the two companies.

Checks have shown that the companies did not encroach beyond the gazetted area, the official added.

He requested the villagers to come to the forestry office here to discuss ways to get compensation from the companies.