

Paying the price as red dust cloud chokes villagers

EXCLUSIVE

KEMAMAN: Yet another case of illegal bauxite mining, this time in Terengganu, has taken its toll on the health of villagers in Kampung Melayu Alor Batu, Jabor, here.

A number of them have been suffering respiratory problems since late last year.

The activity has also polluted nearby Sungai Ladang 7 and Sungai Ladang 8, from where the villagers get their supply of fresh water during water disruptions.

To complicate matters, heavy vehicles which are used to carry the excavated bauxite (an aluminium ore) have damaged several stretches of Jalan Felda Neram, forcing the Public Works Department to erect warning signs.

Checks showed that mining activities are being carried out on several private land parcels along Jalan Jabor Lama, despite the fact that the state Land and Mines Office has never issued the land owners with any mining permit.

It is learnt that the illegal mining activity runs from 7am to 7pm daily, with dozens of lorries and trailers involved in carting the excavated materials to Kuantan Port for export.

State Land and Mines Office director Mohamad Nor Ibrahim said the illegal activity was believed to have started early this year, as the land along Jalan Jabor Lama was rich in aluminium ore.

He said at least 3,000ha of land



An excavator operator carrying out the illegal mining of bauxite in Jalan Jabor Lama, Kemaman, as seen from the window of a nearby house. (Inset) Fauziah Ismail showing the red dust that covers her food stall tables. Pix by Aswadi Alias

“As my house is located just next to the road, I breathe in dirty air every day. I certainly have to blame the pollution for my deteriorating health problem.”

Esah Mohamad
Kampung Melayu Alor Batu villager

along the road was rich in aluminium ore, adding that the excavated materials were sent to China for extraction, as bauxite was the main source of aluminium.

“There are government land, private land and plantation land along the road. The illegal

mining is basically carried out on private land,” he said.

Since January, the office arrested

10 people and detained seven vehicles in connection with illegal bauxite mining under Section 425/426 of the National Land Code for the illegal transfer of earth material. To monitor the illegal activity, Nor said they had mobilised five teams on round-the-clock patrol.

Kampung Melayu Alor Batu villager Esah Mohamad, 78, said she was admitted to hospital recently following persistent cough and shortness of breath.

“The dust will envelope the whole road every day. As my house is located just next to the road, I breathe in dirty air every day. I certainly have

to blame the pollution for my deteriorating health problem.

“I was told that I am not the only one suffering from this problem. There are many others,” she said.

Food seller Fauziah Ismail, 56, said her food stall was located just a stone's throw from the mining site and it was always dusty since the activity started last October.

“I have to mop my stall several times a day or my customers will complain about the thin layer of dust on tables and chairs, which can be irritating. I hope the authorities take action. I have to earn a living, too,” she said.

Her husband, Abu Kasim Awang, 56, said he used to get water from Sungai Ladang 7 and Sungai Ladang 8 for domestic use in the past whenever there was water disruption.

However, he said, the river was badly polluted these days and the water was not suitable for drinking.

“I have complained to the state Land and Mines Office several times but nothing seems to have been done.”

Checks showed severe cracks along roads at several stretches of Jalan Felda Neram, which could be dangerous for motorists especially at night. **By Sim Bak Eng**