

No new illegal clearing on Camerons, says Wan Junaidi

By ROYCE TAN

roycetana@thestar.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR: There are no more new cases of illegal land clearing in Cameron Highlands, says Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar.

He said aerial inspections showed no signs of illegal land clearing, and parts of the forests destroyed were mainly state forests.

"The Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) and the Forestry Department have started replanting at the forest reserves.

"For parts of the forests that were destroyed, we are still discussing with the state government for reforestation and rehabilitation.

"The state government also has to determine whether the lands are from land grants or from illegal clearing," he told a press conference after the awards ceremony for graduating foresters and forest rangers at the Forestry Training Division in Kepong near here yesterday.

On allegations of misappropriation among

officers and officials in the Forestry Department, he said the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission is "observing" the situation.

"If there is any evidence, bring those people to court," he said.

He added that the proposal to raise the fine in the National Land Code (Amendment) Bill 2016 up to RM500,000 had been passed in the Dewan Rakyat.

"If we want to save the water and the rivers, we have to save the forest, observe the river reserves, the siltation and that those in the logging industry must be aware of the effects from these activities.

"If the forests are destroyed, the sponge effect that absorbs water would be gone; rivers will become shallow and floods would easily occur," Dr Wan Junaidi said.

In his speech earlier, Dr Wan Junaidi urged everyone to look beyond timber and try to preserve what was present now as it would be costlier to reforest and replant.

"We have to retain at least 50% of forest cover. If you interfere with nature, then nature fights back against you," he said.