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Police probe into log smuggling

Joseph Bingkasan; Joniston Bangkuai

KOTA KINABALU, Wed. - Police have formed a five-member police team headed by State Criminal Investigation Department chief Senior Assistant Commissioner II Mazlan Tyan to investigate the log smuggling activities uncovered in Tawau recently.

State police chief Deputy Commissioner Datuk Maizan Shaari said the team was now in Tawau and expected to question several people, including forestry officials.

The team was set up after two police reports were lodged by the Forestry Department. The reports were lodged in Tawau on Jan 17 and yesterday.

"The Forestry Department, during its preliminary investigation, suspected criminality. So, we want to probe into it," Maizan told reporters after receiving Hari Raya cakes contributed by Petronas.

The cakes, presented by Petronas general manager for Sabah and Labuan Masri Yusof, will be distributed to police personnel serving at the border.

Maizan said the police investigation had no connection with probes conducted by other departments or agencies.

Before this, the State Government had formed a high-level committee headed by Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Abdul Ghapur Salleh to investigate the matter.

The committee had completed its initial investigation and submitted its report to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim yesterday.

"Our investigation will mainly focus on determining if there are any elements of criminality," Maizan said.

He said as the case was a matter of public interest, the team would try to complete the investigation as soon as possible.

A Klang-registered cargo vessel Able Helmsmen bound for Japan was detained by Forestry Department officials on Jan 18 near the Bakau Forest Reserve near Sebatik Island off Tawau for allegedly attempting to smuggle logs worth RM6 million.

A total of 3,049 logs with a volume of 15,376 cubic metres were seized in the vicinity of the vessel.

Of the total, 281 logs had already been loaded onto the vessel and another 611 had yet to be loaded. Also detained were 2,157 rafted logs.

Meanwhile, the Forestry Department will be making arrangements to facilitate the auctioning of the logs on which unpaid royalty was about RM3 million.

"It is not in anyone's interests that the logs be kept rotting and lying (in Tawau) for long. It's very likely the Forestry Department will be directed to auction them soon," Chief Minister Datuk Yong Teck Lee told the post-Cabinet Press conference today.

Yong also said Ghapur had tabled the investigation committee's reports at the State Cabinet meeting today.

Yong also welcomed the Deputy Prime Minister's directive to the Anti-Corruption Agency to assist in investigations into the log smuggling activities in Sabah. He said the State Government would assist the ACA.

Asked whether the special committee's report had implicated politicians or prominent businessmen in the log smuggling, he said: "Companies and names of individuals were mentioned ... I do not know them.

"Let the police and ACA investigate."

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