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Several questioned over log smuggling in Sabah

KOTA KINABALU, Thurs. - Police have questioned several officers of the State Forestry and Royal Customs and Excise Department, Police Field Force and Marine Police in connection with the log smuggling operation uncovered in Tawau recently.

State Criminal Investigation Department chief Senior Assistant Commissioner II Mazlan Tyan, who is heading the five-man police team, said several more people were expected to be interviewed in the next few days.

"We believe these people can assist us in our investigation," he said, when contacted in Tawau today.

The team, whose members comprise senior CID and commercial crime officers from the State police headquarters, began investigation immediately after it was set up yesterday.

The team left for Tawau yesterday morning.

State police chief Deputy Commissioner Datuk Maizan Shaari, who announced the formation of the team yesterday, said several people including State forestry officials would be questioned in the course of the investigation.

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

The State Forestry Department, in its preliminary investigation, suspects criminality in the operation.

The State Government has also formed a high-level committee headed by Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Abdul Ghapur Salleh to investigate the matter.

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

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

A total of 3,049 logs with an estimated volume of 15,376 cubic metres were seized in the vicinity where the vessel was apprehended.

Meanwhile, a spokesman for the Anti-Corruption Agency here said it had begun investigation into the matter.

"In fact we have been monitoring the situation since the log smuggling operation was uncovered," he said.

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