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Law-Highlands

DOE ASKED TO SUBMIT REPORT ON LAND ABUSE IN CAMERON HIGHLANDS - LAW

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 1 (Bernama) -- The Department of Environment (DOE) has been instructed to submit a full report to the Science, Technology and Environment Ministry on the illegal use of heavy machinery to clear and develop eight hectares of land in Cameron Highlands by a group of companies.

Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Law Hieng Ding said he had asked for the report to be submitted as soon as possible.

He was commenting on a newspaper report today quoting Cameron Highlands District Officer Haron Abdul Kader as saying that the companies had defied two stop-work orders.

Haron said they were ordered to stop work for using heavy machinery and for not covering the extensive slopes that they had exposed in an area formerly part of the Blue Valley Tea Plantation.

Haron also said his officers issued compounds of RM500 for each heavy machine used, but operations resumed almost as soon as his enforcement officers left the site.

Asked whether his ministry would consider raising the compound rates from the present RM500, which is a "chicken feed for companies that violate the law," Law said he would look into it.

He said the law governing the matter was presently under the jurisdiction of local authorities.

"As to the fines, we will look at that, maybe the fines are under the laws of local authorities, we will look at any law that can be used in this case under the DOE," he said.

Law was speaking to reporters after hosting a luncheon for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in conjunction with the Chinese New Year celebrations here today.

Meanwhile, Agriculture Minister Datuk Effendi Norwawi said the present laws and regulations on land abuse should be reviewed to make it more prohibitive for people to break the rules.

"The fines are too minimal and not deterring enough. They will break the law and pay the fines but the damage to the environment and property and even lives is bigger," he said

He said there were certain guidelines for clearing of hills but the issue was how the guidelines could be enforced at the local council level.

"In this kind of issues, we would like the public to co-operate with us, to let us know where they think there are certain abuses and we can assure that the government will take very stern measures to respond to this," he said.

He said the government was concerned about the indiscriminatory development of the highlands.

"Very dangerous...hazardous. We only need the public to help us and we will be looking at this situation very seriously," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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