

Semesta furious over sand mining allegations
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Selangor government subsidiary Kumpulan Semesta Sdn Bhd (KSSB) today strongly denied and condemned allegations that its sand mining activities in Kampung Olak Lempit, Kuala Langat, which were highlighted in the media recently, are illegal.

Describing the allegations made against the state government and company by the mainstream media as a "blatant concoction of vicious lies", KSSB's executive director Ramli Abd Majed said there was no breach of environmental regulations as alleged in the reports.

"We applied for 48.56ha but only 33ha are being mined because that was the only land available for opencast sand extraction. This land is exempted from Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) study as the total area is less than 50ha," he said.

Ramli said although KSSB was not required to conduct any study before mining, it had done so on its own initiative to ensure the people and the surrounding environment are not affected.

He added that KSSB had appointed an independent consultant, Enviro Enhance Sdn Bhd, to carry out the Environmental Management Plan (EMP) on the site.

Enviro Enhance, is registered with the Finance Ministry under Environmental Consultancy. It was incorporated in 2006, and is managed by a group of professionals who also carry out EIA studies for state and federal agencies.

"KSSB has also engaged the services of other environmental consultants to monitor all its sand mining sites to ensure compliance with Department of Environment (DOE) requirements," said Ramli.

Besieged by attacks

This week, several segments of the mainstream media had besieged the Selangor Pakatan Rakyat government over what they claimed as excessive illegal sand mining that was causing an environmental catastrophe to the nearby Paya Indah wetlands.

Selangor opposition leader Dr Mohd Khir Toyo, Selangor Umno liaison deputy chief Noh Omar and Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin have also been attacking the state government and Menteri Besar Khalid Ibrahim for what they claimed to be improper management of the state's resources and for it not doing an EIA report.

The Selangor Pakatan exco Yaakob Sapari has asked the press to apologise for such misleading reports.

KSSB also described such reports as a malicious misappropriation of the truth.

Ramli said the EMP report monitored air and water quality and noise, with monthly reports and quarterly compliance reports that were submitted to the Selangor DOE.

"The EMP report confirms that water discharged from the sand mining activities at Kampung Olak Lempit complies with the DOE recommended limits. We confirm there is no dumping and discharge into the Paya Indah Wetlands.

"The wetlands is under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government," Ramli added.

An detailed EIA study is required for areas exceeding 50ha and KSSB obtained approval from EIA recently to sand mine in sector MC10, which is located within the same area.

Hollow spot allegation baseless

Ramli also denied that KSSB activities had resulted in a hollow area of 60m deep, as also claimed by the media.

"This allegation is totally baseless. The maximum depth we can physically mine is only 30 metres. To even suggest a depth of 60 metres is absurd and unfounded," said Ramli.

The executive director also clarified that the sand mining was conducted about 27m from the waterline and about 40m away from the Paya Indah Wetlands boundary.

"This means the total distance of pit edges to the Paya Indah Wetlands boundary is approximately 67 metres. Furthermore, there is no discharge into the Paya Indah Wetlands and there is no threat to the environment and the wetlands."

Environ Enhance director Geetha Kumaran concurred with his assertions. She said the company's monthly inspections of the mining activities showed that KSSB had complied with the limits recommended by the DOE.

Environ Enhance has prepared and submitted to the Selangor DOE the EMP report for Kampung Olak Lempit, taking into account the activities of the KSSB sand mining operations, and has found that its impact would be managed within the recommended compliance limits.

"This EMP report was accepted by the Selangor DOE in July 2009. Subsequently, when site activities commenced in January 2010, our monitoring and auditing programme started and all reports were submitted to the DOE," said Geetha.

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