

Taib says Global Witness video expose was 'sneaky'
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KUCHING, April 5 — Tan Sri Taib Mahmud has challenged Global Witness to debate him on the issue of illegal land deals in Sarawak, and accused the international environmental activist group of having a hidden agenda by visiting Malaysia's biggest state in a "sneaky way".

He has also suggested links between Global Witness and opposition parties.

"The timing is too much to ignore ... I think there is a link between them and the opposition," said the long-serving Sarawak chief minister, who noted the release of a video showing how illegal land deals are allegedly brokered in the state happened just before with Election 2013 which will be held soon.

Global Witness' accusations against him were also the result of second-hand information obtained from the Bruno Manser Fund (BMF), Taib said in a video interview uploaded online yesterday.

He invited the international activists to observe the real situation in Sarawak themselves as he trumpeted the state's many achievements in preserving its forests.

"Global Witness should ... not (be) hiding behind some picked up second-hand tales from a fellow NGO," Taib told the Malaysian Observer (MobTV) channel, referring to environmental and human rights group BMF.

The chief minister was cast into the international spotlight last month after Global Witness released a video documentary alleging the state Barisan Nasional chief to have received millions of ringgit in kickbacks over land deals that have denuded the Borneo state.

He refuted accusations that only five per cent of forests is left in the state, saying that the true picture can be found by looking at the state using Google's satellite images.

Google maps the Earth using periodic shots taken using satellite imagery and aerial photography in its applications Google Earth and Google Maps.

Taib had said yesterday that he will not co-operate with the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) regarding his graft allegations as he believes the government body to be "naughty" and "dishonest" in its investigations.

"They don't deserve my co-operation because they have been naughty... and they have not been honest," he told reporters after attending a Barisan Nasional leadership meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

He has also maintained his innocence, saying his cousins and others implicated in the video expose were promoting themselves to be his agents to solicit favours.

The video, titled "Inside Malaysia's Shadow State", showed dealings by Global Witness' undercover investigators with Taib's cousins and several other intermediaries to acquire thousands of hectares of forest land, which the group said would displace thousands of

indigenous people living there.

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