

CHARLES HECTOR

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FOR THE ABOLITION OF THE DEATH PENALTY, TOWARDS AN END OF TORTURE,
POLICE ABUSES, DISCRIMINATION...

Monday, January 04, 2016

Bauxite Mining - More evidence of impact to health, environment and livelihood revealed?

The impact of bauxite mining is both short-term and long-term, and it is affecting not just the public health, but also the environment and the livelihood of the people.

New Straits Times (NST) needs to be credited for its expose and also its efforts of independent investigations, which they have been doing since August 2015.

The response of the BN Federal and State government was to try to just narrowly focus attention on the issue of radiation poisoning - and not also focus on the other chemical poisoning happening - arsenic, magnesium, etc..

Even the Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Wilfred Madius Tangau response was narrow - looking just at the question of radiation poisoning.

*NST never faltered but has continued to highlight this issue - this time the investigation and report of a group of 17 professionals who also **called for the Pahang government to issue an immediate stop work order on bauxite mining.***

Interestingly, it seems that the bauxite mining operation may end or significantly slow down next year - is it then that the BN government will take action?

We expect the government to safeguard our health, our environment and also livelihood - and there are laws that stipulate what are the 'safe limits', and this really should never be ignored.

Companies always can 'disappear' or 'wind-up' after large profits are made - their record of accountability is not good. Who will compensate those that have suffered healthwise - noting that some of these diseases can also surface later on? Who will be compensating the fishermen who already say that their income and livelihood is already affected? Who will be responsible for the cost to 'rehabilitate' the environment - most likely the Malaysian people may end up paying for this?

The Pahang government, when the issue was highlighted, also tried to blame those lorries transporting the ore - stating even that summons have been issued. But now, the authorities apparently are saying that most of these summonses

have been ignored. Note many of these summons were traffic summons or the using of vehicles without permits.

There are so many Ministries looking into Health, Environment, Rural Development, Tourism, Agriculture,... but alas, we are not seeing their investigation and reports on this issue..

Bauxite can be mined - and there are safe ways of doing this - which will cause little or no impact to public health or environment - but they will cost money, and these companies and others who benefit from this bauxite mining operation seem 'disinterested', and the BN Pahang and Federal government also seem not so concerned.

We must try to prevent negative impacts to health and environment - and not take the position, that we will do the needful later to remedy or compensate. One would prefer not to get cancer, **asthma, lower respiratory tract infections, pneumonia, chronic bronchitis and emphysema, etc** - I am for prevention not treatment/compensation.

There are many more news reports in NST and media on this issue, over the last few days, and I have only pasted one of these articles below..

See some of the earlier related posts:-

[Bauxite Mining Pahang:Seafood and Vege from Kuantan?Arsenic/Magnesium Poisoning? Safe for Consumption?](#)

[Pahang:- Fish high arsenic levels? - Suspend Bauxite Mining Now - Health More Important than Money??](#)

[Bauxite - Pahang BN state government ignoring welfare of the people? Safe mining procedures?](#)

[Red Threat - Are Malaysians still being poisoned with arsenic, etc because government not bothered?](#)

[Bauxite affecting Kuantan children's health - When will PM Najib act?](#)

Kuantan facing severe danger

By Farrah Naz Karim And Aliza Shah

- 3 January 2016 @ 11:03 AM KUALA LUMPUR:

A team of scientists has warned that the damage to the environment from the indiscriminate and poorly regulated mining of bauxite may be so severe that the ecosystem may never recover.

The **adverse health effects on the Kuantan public could be devastating, and could last for generations.**

The group of 17 professionals covering a diverse array of environmental disciplines have **called for the Pahang government to issue an immediate stop work order on bauxite mining** in the district.

This marked the first time that a group of independent scientists had arrived at a consensus and issued a dire and comprehensive warning of the consequences of the unrestrained mining of bauxite in the state.

Calling itself **Responsible Citizens of Malaysia and Conscientious Professionals and Scientists**, the group cautioned that Kuantan would suffer long-term health and environmental consequences if the authorities ignored the seven conditions it said must be imposed on every bauxite mine and mining operator.

It stressed that a moratorium on all the activities must be enforced with immediate effect, saying that this was vital to mitigate the damage. Among the recommendations that came with the report on the grave situation in Kuantan was the requirement for miners to produce an Erosion Sediment Control Plan (ESCP), which must be a part of an Environmental Monitoring Plan that is closely and diligently monitored.

The miners, they said, must also come up with a **rehabilitation plan once the mining ceases**. It was reported that the mining of bauxite would go on at least until next year.

Their comprehensive, 14-page report on the unfolding disaster stemming from poorly regulated open cast mining of bauxite, which was made exclusively available to the New Sunday Times, also touched extensively on how transportation of the resource not only posed a **serious public health threat, but is also causing irreversible environmental damage.**

They reported that the export of bauxite to China had more than quadrupled, from 208,770 tonnes in 2013 to 963,000 tonnes in 2014.

Last year, it hit a staggering 20 million tonnes. In January of last year, the amount of ore exported was just 343,000 tonnes.

By September, the number had risen to an astounding 3.7 million tonnes. All at the expense of a suffering Kuantan public, forced to choke on the red dust.

The **NST had, in early August, collected water, marine life and dust samples** in Kuantan for independent laboratory analyses. The results were startling.

At least two other agencies which followed up on the NST's series of reports on the problem came up with equally worrying findings.

The authorities, which were supposed to keep the problem in check, have so far not yielded any positive results.

Their only success to date is reflected in the number of summonses issued to bauxite lorry drivers, although the issuing authority admitted that these tickets were largely ignored.

A large portion of the blame had been dumped on illegal miners.

The NST was made to understand that the group of scientists, whose members had stationed themselves in Kuantan for a few weeks to study the problem which had besieged the city for more than a year, was expected to forward their report to the state government soon.

The report comes with **a recommended action plan**. "It is our professional duty and responsibility to objectively and scientifically assess the environmental and human conditions related to this bauxite mining issue and present our recommendations for corrective and remedial measures," the experts said.

The scientists said their discovery that ore processing outside of the mineral tenement area, including bauxite-washing that was being done close to water sources, was a cause for grave concern.

The concern, they said, was real as **rivers were being barricaded and dammed up to facilitate washing of the ore** to concentrate its bauxite content.

They added that the stability of these structures, if compromised, could result in serious repercussions to the downstream areas when mud and sediment come gushing down.

"This very real risk is amplified during the rainy season as the volume of water increases."

This, they said, was in addition to the **issue of several water intake points being downstream of many bauxite mines**.

They underscored the risk of heavy metals, including arsenic, mercury and aluminium, as well as other pollutants, entering the rivers during rain.

The effects on aquatic life in Pahang's rivers, including the more than 400 species of freshwater fishes, five species of terrapins and numerous species of invertebrates and aquatic plants, can only be guessed.

"While the present situation is disturbing enough, its longer term persistence would mean that there would be no scope for the affected waterways to return to their original state. The changes would be so extreme that the fundamental habitat qualities that support our local biodiversity would be lost and we would be left with a degraded ecosystem," they cautioned.

The group also revealed that they had, on Dec 26 and 27, monitored the 24-hour PM10 levels in Bukit Goh, Beserah (just outside residents' homes), and the Gebeng Industrial Estate, adjacent to Kuantan Port.

The result: the 24-hour PM10 levels recorded outside the houses were at 222.13 g/m³ (Bukit Goh) and 164.05 g/m³ (Beserah).

The sampling carried out in Gebeng showed a reading of 276.79µg/m³. All three **exceeded the standard levels underlined under the 24-hour Malaysian Ambient Air Quality Standard for PM10, which is 150 µg/m³.**

Samples at the house in Beserah, located close to a bauxite mine and along a bauxite transport route, were taken on a day when the transportation of bauxite had ceased.

PM10 dust can easily **penetrate the human lower respiratory tract and cause or trigger respiratory problems like asthma, lower respiratory tract infections, pneumonia, chronic bronchitis and emphysema.**

Depending on the chemical content of the PM10 dust, they may also experience other health problems.

The scientists highlighted the **NST's August reports on the high levels of arsenic in fish** caught in Sungai Pengorak.

The arsenic content of three fish samples ranged from 70.8 to 104.5g/kg, **more than a staggering 70,000 times the permissible limit for arsenic in fish and fishery products of 1mg/kg, under the Malaysian Food Regulation 1985.**

“We should be reminded that the lack of evidence of destruction and harm to the environment and humans should not be used as an excuse not to act or to delay action.

“When there is potential harm to the environment or humans, we should be proactive and not reactive in our approach.

“This approach of harm avoidance is based on the Precautionary Principle, which states that when human activities may lead to morally unacceptable harm that is scientifically plausible but uncertain, actions shall be taken to avoid or diminish that harm.”

They said the authorities should not dismiss such reports without investigating for themselves.

“A recent news report in the NST (Dec 29) showed a disturbing photo of a young man collecting clams (remis) from the bauxite-contaminated Sungai Pengorak and two children playing in the bauxite-contaminated sea waters off Batu Hitam beach.

“If heavy metals are present in the river water as we strongly suspect, they will be easily concentrated in the clams, which are bivalves and filter feeders.

“Wading and swimming in the contaminated waters are also dangerous as heavy metals in the water can penetrate human skin, eyes and mucous linings. Swimmers will also ingest water,” they warned.

While the state authorities have played down the risks posed by bauxite mining, **the state Fisheries Department had, on Dec 31, warned the public against consuming seafood obtained from bauxite-contaminated waters off Pahang.**

Its director, Adnan Hussain Adnan, also advised against fishing, which he said was not suitable in these areas due to the high level of turbidity.

It is understood that the group will also forward their report to Putrajaya. “It is absolutely imperative that the state government address the issues by controlling every single mining operation at the source.

Only then can they be made sustainable in the long run. “A populated area cannot be transformed into a huge mining area without serious consequences to the population of 400,000.

“The state government cannot abdicate its responsibility to look after the well-being and health of these people.

“Justifying extensive mining in a well-populated area simply because they give income to a small group of people is totally wrong and unheard of in this day and age.

“In developed countries, this will undoubtedly result in civil suits,” they said. - New Straits Times, 3/1/2015

Read More : <http://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/01/120276/kuantan-facing-severe-danger>