

Indonesia to fight illegal logging

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The government should set up a task force to deal with rampant illegal logging, mining and poaching, which are causing billions of dollars in state losses, the National Resilience Institute (Lemhannas) said.

"Such a task force should be taken into consideration -- the government must eliminate the roots of the problem," Lemhannas head Ermaya Suradinata told a House Commission hearing on security affairs on Wednesday.

Ermaya estimated the loss from illegal logging at US\$3.5 billion a year while fish poaching cost the state \$4 billion annually. Sand smuggling and fuel smuggling added another \$8.1 billion.

"Indonesia's economy will collapse if these evil practices are not stopped," Ermaya warned.

The combined \$15.6 billion of annual losses equaled 37 percent of the expected domestic revenue in the current fiscal year and was three times Indonesia's foreign debt budget.

Commission members said the sand smuggling, mostly used for reclamation projects overseas, had reduced Indonesia's territory. They suspected the rampant theft was perpetrated by government officials from different institutions with well-knit coordination.

Ermaya suggested the government not only focus on big-time criminals, but also on officials in Jakarta and in regional administrations.

Illegal logging, Ermaya said, was visible in the Annual Review and Assessment of the World Timber Association 2001, which found discrepancies in the volume of Indonesia's official timber exports and the data of imported timber in recipient countries such as China,



Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Netherlands and the U.S.

According to the report, China imported 617,712 cubic meters of logs from Indonesia in 2000, but data in Indonesia showed that it exported only 6,054 M3 to the world's most populated country.

Malaysia claimed to import 523,000 M3 of logs from Indonesia in the same period but Indonesia had no reported exports to its neighbor.

"Discrepancies are found not only in data about logs, but also in timber and pulp," Ermaya added.

Legislators expressed their disappointment with the increasing scale of illegal logging.

Deputy chairman of the Reform faction Djoko Susilo said the illegal logging had left 43 million hectares of land in a critical condition.

"Deforestation has depleted between 1.6 hectare to 2.1 hectares of forest per year. It also has destroyed some species of our diverse forests," he said.

Sidarto Danusubroto of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle also expressed a similar concern. Local government officials had been involved in the "illegal logging mafia," he said.

Sidarto supported Minister of Forestry Muhammad Prakosa who has planned to launch a logging moratorium in an attempt to save the forest.

The proposal has been opposed by four governors in Kalimantan, home to most of the country's tropical forest timber.

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