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'Clear threat' to water

THE recent Belum-Temengor saga highlighted in "[Clear threat](#)" (*The Star*, Sept 18) is nothing new in Malaysia. We have seen much forest cover fall due to the "need" to develop.

The definition of development is far away from just logging activities. Usually state governments will justify that the state needs money, and logging is the best way forward. But, is it so?

Water consumption is basically divided into domestic, industry (including commercial) and agriculture use, accounting for 17%, 21% and 62%, respectively. In addition to that, a few industries and almost all agriculture activities use water direct from nature and not treated water.

According to Malaysia Water Industry Guide 2010, domestic users consumed 2.02 billion cubic metres of treated water (1 cubic metre is equivalent to 1,000 litres) in 2009.

The Association of Water and Energy Research Malaysia estimates that the industrial sector uses around 2.5 billion cubic metres of water, and the agriculture sector about 7.3 billion cubic metres.

Our water supply is very much tied up with forests. If we fail to keep our taps flowing, can the states imagine the loss in investment and job opportunities? For example, if Ulu Muda forest reserve is logged, Kedah, Penang and Perlis will face a huge water supply shortage for both treated water and agricultural water use.

If Pahang fails to keep water catchments protected, the Pahang-Selangor raw water transfer project will be a white elephant.

I would also like to share the real life experience of a dear old couple I know who live along Jalan Trong in Changkat Jering in Perak.

In the past they faced floods once a year, which they had adjusted to. But recently, a logging activity started upstream of this area resulted in 14 floods – sometimes three times a month (the last during the month of Ramadan). The downstream kampongs are badly affected due to this logging activity. The wild boars from the forest are now hanging around these kampongs as they have lost their homes in the forest. The wild boars destroy crops and vegetation.

Billions of ringgit were used to replace destroyed infrastructures and for mitigation measures due to floods.

This does not include the loss of income and other opportunity costs.

If we balance all the income generated from logging and compare it with the cost of flood due to forest destruction, there will not be a positive impact to the state at all.

This will only lead some of us to think that certain protected forests are allowed to be illegally logged so that it gets destroyed a bit first. Eventually, legalising logging would be an easy job since it has already been destroyed in the first place. If we travel on internal roads and meet the people, there are thousands of such stories.

Illegal loggers may be good in covering their tracks, but there is no perfect crime.

Why are we not using satellite imaging to detect such illegal activities?

The Malaysian Centre for Remote Sensing has cloud-free pictures that can assist us to see forest destruction clearly and to take

preventive measures.

Even if we take just a helicopter ride, we can already identify any forest destruction easily. This is due to the nature of logging routes.

It is time the relevant authorities buck up.

We will face the wrath of nature if we continue to neglect the importance of forests. Water is life.

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