

# The law raises its timbre

Illegal logging, once rampant in Pahang, appears to have been curbed, thanks to the state Forestry Department's move to ensure contractors abide by the rules and strict enforcement, writes **T.N. ALAGESH**

**N**EARLY two-thirds of Pahang is covered with verdant rain-forest, a magnificent milieu of lush greenery, home to exotic wildlife and diverse flora.

Out of a total of 3.6 million hectares, 58 per cent is covered by forests of various types from mangroves on the coast to hill and montane (highlands) forest.

This blessed area has not only attracted nature lovers, but illegal loggers as well.

The state government has adopted several measures, including a requirement that all logging firms adhere to the Malaysian Criteria and Indicators for Forest Management Certification — a standard to assess forest management set by the Malaysian Timber Certification Council and the Forest Stewardship Council in 1999.

Logging is mainly carried out in the 130 forest reserves in the state.

All authorised logging areas with rivers flowing through must have buffer zones on the banks to prevent water pollution.

For rivers which are more than 7m wide, the buffer zone should be three times wider than the river, while for rivers less than 7m wide, the buffer zone should be at least 20m wide.

The state government has also changed the procedure to have the logging contractors' names on the logging licence instead of the landowners to that the contractor would be more responsible towards the site and ensure the trees are felled according to the regulations.

To curb loggers from cutting down

## ILLEGAL LOGGING CASES

**11**

2004

**10**

2005

**23**

2006

**12**

2007

**28**

2008

**3**

2009

more trees than allowed in their permit, the state government will only issue licences for areas larger than 250ha and only to logging companies with a strong financial position.

Enforcement by the Pahang government and the Forestry Department has produced positive results.

Ninety-two cases of illegal logging were reported to the Pahang Forestry Department from 2004 to November this year. Of the total, 11 cases were reported in 2004, 10 in 2005, 23 in 2006, 12 in 2007, 28 in 2008 and three last year.

Up to November this year, five cases have been reported. Action has been taken on two of the cases while the rest are still being investigated.





Pahang Forestry Department officers checking an illegally logged lumber site in Rompin in 2007. The department's efforts has made life difficult for illegal loggers.

## Stiffer fines, jail terms to deter culprits

THE National Land Council's proposal of a maximum RM1 million fine for illegal logging and five-year jail term received the thumbs up from the Pahang Forestry Department.

State director Datuk Mohd Paiz Kamarulzaman said the deterrent sentence was a timely move.

But he said it was up to the courts to determine how serious the offence was and the sentence imposed.

An owner of a logging firm in Raub said despite the government's efforts, at the end of the day what mattered most was the individual.

The owner, 56, who only wanted to be identified as Lim, said if the culprits were determined to carry out their activities then it would be tough to prevent them.

"The same applies to drug cases. Despite knowing that they can re-

ceive a hefty punishment, people still take their chances as the monetary gains are huge.

"The government can impose severe punishment but people will have to cooperate for it to succeed."

Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin had announced the move to amend the National Forestry Act last week and it is expected to be tabled in Parliament next year.