



The red sea phenomenon at Batu Hitam beach in Kuantan is believed to be caused by bauxite pollution. Pic by Shafiq Zain

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Another meeting on bauxite woes

WITH MB: I hope this is the last time we will meet on this, says Wan Junaidi

AINA NASA
KUALA LUMPUR
news@nst.com.my

THE simmering bauxite issue in Pahang may see closure soon, after the fourth and possibly last meeting between Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar and Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob.

Wan Junaidi told the *New Straits Times* yesterday that the meeting would be his fourth with Adnan to

conclude a final and resolute solution to the issue.

"I hope this will be the last time we meet to discuss bauxite mining. We will discuss the measures the ministry will take for a comprehensive and wholesome solution to the bauxite issue, not just the issue of the sea turning red," he said, without disclosing the date.

"There was never a need to meet anyone four times to settle an issue before this," he said.

Comments from Adnan were not immediately available.

NST's Special Probes Team was the first to uncover the unregulated mining of bauxite in the state in August, which then was said to be potentially hazardous, as deadly radioactive material could be released into the environment, contaminating the air and water sources.

On Tuesday, heavy showers near Balok in Kuantan turned its sea red.

Heavy rain for more than 24 hours since Sunday was believed to have washed the bauxite residue from the stockpile near Kuantan Port into the nearby river, which flows into the sea.

Wan Junaidi said unless the cabinet meeting next week instructed him to take urgent steps, he would wait until the meeting with Adnan before adopting the solution.

"The whole issue is a matter of state and federal authority. Issues of licensing and extraction of minerals are under the purview of the state government.

"When it involves pollution, like it has now, it forces the Federal Government to intervene and discuss with the state government," he said.

He added that since the occurrence of the red sea phenomenon on Tuesday, he had ordered the Department of Environment to take samples of the water on alternate days, during and after floods, if any.

On Thursday, however, he said the result of the sample analysis would be known after two or three weeks.

"After that, we will take action based on the sampling results; that is all we can do. There was im-

mediate action following this problem, that is, pertaining to the drainage system. But now when there is rainfall, the bauxite is exposed, and runs into the rivers and sea."

The activities at Kuantan Port were out of the ministry's jurisdiction, he said.

"Ports are under the purview of the state government and the Transport Ministry, while drainage and irrigation are under the state government and local authorities. Many parties are involved in this."

Page 1 pic: A villager, **Zulkifli Samad, 23, looking for shellfish in the bauxite-polluted Sungai Pengorak near Kuantan on Tuesday.** Pic by Luqman Hakim Zubir

Lack of enforcement, human greed to blame, says NGO

KUALA LUMPUR: The red sea phenomenon, which turned the sea near Balok, Kuantan, a coppery hue on Tuesday morning, is one of the worst outcomes of the free-for-all bauxite mining in Pahang, according to an environmentalist.

More than a day's rain since Sunday was believed to have washed bauxite residue from the stockpile near Kuantan Port into a nearby river, which runs off into the sea.

Environmental Protection Society

Malaysia president Nithi Nesadurai told the *New Straits Times* that this could be attributed to the lack of enforcement and human greed.

"The problem started slowly, but escalated in the past three years. Now, everything has gone haywire and the authorities are not doing much about it."

The unregulated mining activities, Nithi added, enriched a few people, but caused suffering to residents living nearby.

"We are paying an environmental price.

"Bauxite mining has become a free-for-all, even though it requires approval from the authorities.

"Even if you own the land, you cannot do whatever you want with it.

"You need permission. All regulations, regarding land, transportation or others, have been ignored."

Nithi described the actions of the irresponsible miners and the lack of

action against them as shameful.

NST's Special Probes Team was the first to uncover the uncontrolled and unregulated mining of bauxite in Pahang in August.

"The guilty parties will dig and clear the land until the mineral is depleted, which probably takes only three years.

"This seems to be a point of no return, as the supply of bauxite could last 10 or 20 years before this," Nithi said.

An effort to wipe out its effects, Nithi said, could be elusive, but the setting up of a task force could control and reduce them.

"Led by the Federal Government, the task force should consist of the state governments and the relevant departments, like local authorities and the Transport Ministry."

Although it seemed to be an uphill battle, Nithi said, at least the task force could be a reference model if the problem recurred.