

NST Leader: Licence to 'kill' nature

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Culprits for some mysterious reasons have achieved the status of unmentionables. Until, of course, there is a royal intervention as in Tasik Chini. - NSTP/FARIZUL HAFIZ AWANG

THOSE looking in from the outside must think Malaysians are one incompetent or apathetic lot. Or both. We can't blame them. For decades, one hill after another is being raped. And plundered, too. Cameron Highlands, Lojing Highlands, Gunung Inas.

And now even a lake is the victim: the once pristine Tasik Chini. Yet, the powers-that-be at the centre and in the states are engaging in fruitless debates in apportioning the blame.

Almost always, the culprits don't feature in blame game at all. We saw this in Gunung Inas, where a forest farm-turned-durian orchard was the source of all harm. We saw this again in Lojing Highlands.

Culprits for some mysterious reasons have achieved the status of unmentionables. Until, of course, there is a royal intervention as in Tasik Chini. Is our incompetence or apathy so deep that we have to wait for the palace to wake us up from some deep ecological slumber?

As the debates continue *ad nauseam*, people lose their lives and homes. Unsurprisingly, the forest we lose and the wildlife that gets maimed and killed because of human folly don't seem to matter at all. Granted, rape is a harsh word, but that is what it is: a molestation of nature. By illegal and legal means.

We rightly have a harsh punishment for the crime of rape. But we appear not to be willing to have one for the rape of nature. Is it because we think that the flora has no life? Or is it because we think that the fauna has a lesser life than ours? Either way, we are paving a cruel path to the abyss.

Why mining leases in a fragile biosphere such as Tasik Chini? Is Malaysia in a do-or-die situation that we have to issue licences to the mining companies to "kill" the pristine environment? Yes, rehabilitation is possible, but the restored "after" will never be the same as the untouched "before".

The balance of nature is a very fine one. Kill one and the domino effect will be set in motion. This is what facing the consequences mean. But the sad truth is this: culprits don't get to face the fallout; victims do. The powers-that-be must know this: if there is no accountability, impunity will reign supreme. It does right now.

Putrajaya and the state governments must make the culprits pay. By culprits, we mean the mining companies, the vegetable farms, forest farms and durian orchards, and those who approve them into being when they should not. Now that there is a royal intervention in Pahang, we can be assured that there will be a pause.

We say "pause" because we fear the mining companies may think moratorium to mean a mere interlude. Besides, Pahang Regent Tengku Hassanal Ibrahim Alam Shah Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah can't be going to the ground every now and then to check whether ecological crimes are being committed in the state.

Neither must we expect the sultans of other states to do the same. As the regent says, we can have all the laws we want, but if the enforcement is ineffective, it would mean nothing.

It's time for the authorities to bring the culprits to account. Not just in Tasik Chini, but in Gunung Inas, Lojing Highlands and elsewhere. Their message should be this: ecological crime doesn't pay.