Sand thief at it again

ADAMANT: Illegal sand mine operator did not heed order to vacate

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AN illegal sand mine operator, who was ordered to stop work in Bukit Beruntung on April 10, was caught at the same spot again yesterday.

This time, he was fined RM8,000 for the spot and had his machinery disabled by Selangor Waters Management Authority (Luas).

The man, in his 50s, was supposed to vacate the site by April 17.

Instead, he had continued extracting sand and water from Sungai Selangor without a licence.

Enforcement officers, accompanied by Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) personnel, arrived at the scene at 11am.

They saw five workers jumping into the river in an effort to escape.

Three of them managed to swim across while another two sat on plastic barrels used as buoys.

Luas officers spent 20 minutes coaxing them to come back to have their statement recorded.

It is learnt that the same operator was fined RM5,000 and told to stop his activities in 2009.

The local man, in his 50s, had been given a one-week notice to stop operation and vacate the land, which is located at the bank of Sungai Selangor, on April 10 for extracting sand and water from the river without licence.

Luas enforcement division officer Zulkifli Idrus said they seized four batteries, an alternator and a starter to disable the water and sand pumps.

He said the operator was also found to have trespassed on the area as checks with state Lands and Mines Department (PTGS) found that the land was registered in another individual's name.

"In this joint-operation with MACC, led by Putrajaya MACC senior enforcement officer Yussuf Zakaria, investigations revealed that the illegal operation had been going on for at least five years.

"Checks conducted early this year found that the man was adamant and continued mining sand here despite knowing that he needs a licence from Luas to do so."

When asked why Luas did not seize the machinery at the site, Zulkifli said they were only authorised to seize components from the machinery used to extract sand and water from Sungai Selangor, which is under their jurisdiction.

He said Luas would bring the case to PTGS as it had the authority to seize the machinery should the activity continues.

It is learnt that the department also has the power to seize the land used for the illegal activity if the owner is found to be in cohort with the operator. But the fine may not have any effect on the operator as his operation can net up to RM200,000 a month.

A MACC source said investigations revealed that the operator could sell up to 15 lorry-loads of sand daily for RM400 to RM500 per load.