Sand storm in the offing

Heated debate over issue expected in Selangor assembly next week

KLANG: The rampant sand theft in Selangor is certain to be a topic of heated debate in the state assembly next week, with Barisan Nasional assemblymen bringing up the issue.

MCA's Kuala Kubu Baru assemblyman Wong Koon Mun said the current system of allowing state-owned Kumpulan Semesta Sdn Bhd (KSSB) to monopolise sand mining had led to corruption and inflated property prices.

"When they first appointed KSSB to manage sand, I said it was a wrong move," he told The Star.

Wong believed that one reason why illegal mining happened over the past few years was the lack of enforcement.

"KSSB sub-contracts the work, and they get the royalty. But who monitors them? Where's the check and balance?" he asked.

Wong said the free market system practised under the previous Barisan state government was better as it allowed private land owners to apply for permits to mine sand on their property.

By allowing competition, he said, sand prices could be kept low, thus preventing construction costs from spiralling.

PKR's Kapar MP S. Manikavasagam agreed there was a lack of enforcement, and proposed that a task force be set up to monitor sand mining.

He also called on the Selangor select committee on competency, accountability and transparency to conduct hearings urgently, citing an example two years ago when it took months for witnesses to be called up.

"By then, the witnesses had lost interest and declined to testify at the committee's hearing," he said.

State Opposition Leader Datuk Satim Diman said Barisan representatives were sure to raise the matter in the state assembly.

"I reserve my comments for now. I will address this in the Dewan," said the Seri Serdang assemblyman from Umno.

Wong, Yap Ei Wah (Sungai Pelek), Abdul Shukor Idrus (Kuang), Datuk Satim Diman (Seri Serdang) and Datuk Seri Subahan Kamal (Taman Templar) are among the Barisan assemblymen expected to debate the issue.

Sand miner: No dispute with KHSB

KLANG: State-owned sand mining company Kumpulan Semesta Sdn Bhd has hit back at news reports which suggested irregularities in its operations.

Its CEO Wan Halim Wan Ismail said there was no dispute between KSSB and Kumpulan Hartanah Sdn Bhd (KHSB) over sand-mining operations on a 20ha site in Dengkil.

KHSB consented for KSSB to mine the sand area before the operation started while terms were being negotiated.

"KSSB duly paid KHSB RM630,968 in February 2011, and KHSB had not raised the matter since then," Wan Halim said in a statement yesterday.

He also denied that Mentri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim was involved in negotiations or financial arrangements between the two companies.

The Star ran reports on Thursday quoting KHSB sources as saying that KHSB should have received RM2.6mil instead of RM630,000.

The sources said Khalid had also intervened when KHSB threatened legal action against KSSB.

Wan Halim also clarified that KSSB was not involved in enforcement against illegal sand mining as the company did not have legal powers to do so, but it had helped by reporting such activities to the respective land officers.