

Malaysia bans bauxite mining for three months amid pollution fears

January 6 2016



In this picture taken October 14, 2015, vegetation is seen covered with a coat of bauxite-laden dust outside a palm plantation now being razed to mine bauxite at Bukit Goh in Malaysia's rural state of Pahang

Malaysia Wednesday announced a three-month ban on bauxite mining in its rural state of Pahang from mid-January amid mounting concern over hazardous dust and pollution.

Demand for bauxite, which is used in aluminium production, is soaring—fuelled by heavy demand from China.

"Everything will come to a complete stop on January 15," Environment Minister Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar told a press conference, adding that current stockpiles would be cleared within the next three months.

He also said new measures would be put in place such as a better drainage system in the port at Pahang's capital Kuantan to prevent bauxite contamination which has turned the sea red.

The ban would be extended if the industry is unable to mitigate the pollution hazard.

"If it (the industry) is not able to manage the situation in three months, then we will extend the moratorium," the minister said.

When AFP visited Kuantan recently, red dust swirled around the pits and along the roads on which bauxite-laden trucks rumbled towards Kuantan for shipment to China.

Residents complained of a rise in respiratory problems and skin rashes.

There are also fears of heavy metals entering the water supply or the food chain.

Bauxite mining took off in Malaysia shortly after Indonesia, a top producer, banned mineral ore exports in January 2014 to encourage the domestic processing of metals. This left major consumers like China short of the commodity.

Malaysia, previously an insignificant producer of bauxite, helped fill the gap with a sharp rise in mining—most of it illegal.

Pahang's Chief Minister Adnan Yaakob urged residents to stay calm about pollution.

"We are doing everything to assist them," he told the press conference, adding that authorities were working on a "grand plan" to overcome problems permanently and get a better grip on illegal miners.

Kuantan's opposition member of parliament Fuziah Salleh hailed the temporary ban.

"The 700,000 people living in Kuantan are exposed to pollution. The rivers, a source of drinking water are polluted, the air is filled with [red dust](#) and fish in the rivers have died," she said.

"We must stop the destruction of Mother Nature."

Adnan said he was not concerned about a drop in revenue during the ban, saying the moratorium would help push up prices later on.

Malaysian bauxite output more than quadrupled year-on-year in 2014 to nearly 963,000 tonnes, according to government figures.

© 2016 AFP

Citation: Malaysia bans bauxite mining for three months amid pollution fears (2016, January 6) retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2016-01-malaysia-bauxite-months-pollution.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.