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Imprison poachers, those guilty of abetting crime

MANY animals in the country are going to be extinct if no drastic steps are taken to address their killing and poaching, which are getting to critical levels.

Countries with high biodiversity such as Malaysia have become a source of, transit area and hub for smuggled species.

The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime has estimated the global wildlife trafficking industry to be worth between US\$7 billion and US\$23 billion annually. It is rather unfortunate that a 2016 report by the Wildlife Justice Commission revealed that Kuala Lumpur is the easiest port to move illegal wildlife.

The report also revealed that it costs traffickers 50 per cent less to move contraband through the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) and klia2, compared to Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport.

We must remember that such illegal activities are significant contributors to loss of biodiversity and extinction of species.

There is an urgent need to review all existing laws, especially legislation pertaining to animal poaching.

The government should expedite its plan to amend the Wildlife Conservation Act 2010 to imprison poachers for more than 10 years and fine them up to RM5 million upon conviction. It is timely, in view of the rampant poaching cases that threaten protected species.

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) has also made a clarion call that without serious action, the already critically small population of various wildlife including the Bornean pygmy elephant will suffer the same fate as the Sumatran rhino which is already extinct in the wild.

Poaching numbers continue to increase and SAM believes that this is due to the absence of arrests of high-level individuals in connection with these seizures.

The government should, therefore, consider mandatory imprisonment not only for poachers but

also for those charged and proven guilty of abetting the culprits. We must also take into account the police's recommendation for mandatory whipping for criminals involved in wildlife smuggling, and tighten conditions for the issuance of firearms licences and hunting permits.

We should treat wildlife crime seriously as stiffer penalties alone are not enough to deter such crimes.

As for enforcement of the law, the government should strengthen the collaboration among the enforcement agencies, including increasing the number of military or police personnel to check and prevent poaching activities, especially in our forest reserves.

We should not allow more species to face the same fate as the Sumatran rhino or the fate of leatherback turtles, Malayan tigers and the gaur, which are in peril.

Greater public awareness, better law enforcement and political will are needed to not only



A container full of protected turtles valued at RM250,000 that was seized by authorities.

prevent poaching activities and illegal wildlife trade but also to avoid over-exploitation of natural resources.

Protecting our nature's treasure trove it requires collaboration across non-governmental organisations, the government, corporate stakeholders and local communities.

We must take immediate action to help conserve our biodiversity, which includes more than 15,000 species of flowering plants, 1,500 species of terrestrial vertebrates, and about 150,000 species of invertebrates.

Despite our hectic schedules and quest to become a developed nation, it is necessary for us to spare a little time to step aside and ask what we need to do to

deal with the multiple environmental threats that could wipe out our precious biodiversity.

We must stress on human behavioural change to help stop wildlife trade and roadkill, and for the relevant laws to succeed, there must be public education to encourage all to fight against wildlife exploitation and appreciate the animals' existence.

Efforts to protect our wildlife are also in line with the theme for this year's Earth Day celebration, which is "Protect Our Species". It is intended to educate and raise awareness of the accelerating rate of extinction of various species of flora and fauna.

TAN SRI LEE LAM THYE
Animal welfare activist