

## Cops aim at illegal logging in W. Sumatra

The West Sumatra Police have placed cracking down on illegal logging on the top of their to-do list, following deforestation that has exacerbated floods in the province. "Illegal logging is one of the illegal activities on top of our priority list for us to eradicate," West Sumatra Police chief Brig. Gen. Wahyu Indra Pramugari said in Padang, the provincial capital, recently.

Wahyu said that he needed wide support to stop wildcat loggers from deforesting the province. "Without the support of every element of society and the local administrations, we cannot do much of anything," Wahyu said, as quoted by Antara news agency.

The police general said that wildcat loggers only sought profit without thinking about the impact of their activity and how deforestation can make flooding worse.

Damage to the environment, would obviously affect the community, Wahyu said, especially in case of natural disasters, such as landslides and floods, which have occurred with increasing frequency in the province.

"Natural disasters not only claim the lives of people, but can also create huge material losses as a result of the illegal activities of people who no longer want to protect the forest," Wahyu said.

Most recently, Padang was struck by floods after hours of rain on Sept. 13, leaving four people dead and several dozens more without homes.

The incident followed a flash flood that struck six districts in Padang on July 25, creating billions of rupiah in damages, as estimated by the National Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPB). Separately, BNPB spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho said that the flood in July damaged more than 1,000 homes, two school buildings, one community health center (Puskesmas), 11 places of worship and 11 irrigation channels. The flood also tore down bridges and disrupted road access in the region.

"Losses from damaged houses and public facilities reached Rp 11.37 billion [US\$1.18 million], while the losses from damaged bridges and roads amounted to Rp 17.6 billion," Sutopo said.

The flash flood swept Pauh, Lubuk Begalung, Nanggalo, Lubuk Kilangan, Kuranji, Bungus Teluk Kabung and East Padang districts. The BNPB previously reported that Pauh district was the most affected area, with 64 badly damaged buildings.

Wahyu said he had instructed police stations in West Sumatra to take stern action against illegal loggers and to process every case of illegal logging in their jurisdictions.

"We will also take stiff action against police officers who are involved in illegal logging," Wahyu said.

The West Sumatra Police have uncovered 44 illegal logging cases as of September this year, down 48 percent from 85 cases in the same period last year.

"The disclosure of the illegal logging cases is due to the support from every element of society, as well as cooperation between the police, forestry office and the TNI [Indonesian Military]," Wahyu said.

As part of efforts to suppress illegal logging, Wahyu said that the police had conducted community outreach programs and crackdowns. Wahyu said that cases of illegal logging in West Sumatra were most prevalent in South Solok and Pasaman regencies and on the province's borders, such as in Kerinci National Park in Pesisir Selatan regency.