

KL slams ban on advert

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By Stephen Then, The Star

The British Government's ban on a Malaysian palm oil advertisement because of native land disputes and alleged victimisation of the Penans in Sarawak by logging and palm oil giants "is unfair".

Deputy International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Jacob Sagan said the federal and state authorities had put in great effort to not only protect the environment, but also the natives' welfare.

"Any move jeopardising the export of Malaysian palm oil will inevitably affect the livelihoods of those working in the plantations," he said.

"It is not fair to link a business issue with a native rights issue because they can be dealt with separately.

"The palm oil industry in Malaysia helps to improve the livelihood of tens of thousands of people, especially smallholders living in rural areas," he added.

According to Survival International, the UK Advertising Standards Agency banned the advertisement placed by the Malaysian Palm Oil Council in a British business magazine because the advertisement said Malaysian palm oil was sustainable and contributed to poverty-eradication and the development of rural people.

The London-based group deals with issues involving the rights of indigenous communities across the globe.

"The UK advertisement regulator ruled that the advertisement was misleading as the palm oil industry had infringed on the rights of the natives and their land," said the group's director Stephen Corry in an e-mail.

"The regulator ruled that Malaysia's claim that palm oil is green and people-friendly is not credible because the industry's expansion into the rural areas had caused disaster to the people's lives," he added.

Meanwhile, Sagan said the Plantation Industries and Commodities Ministry was in a better position to try to lift the ban by explaining the true situation in the country.