

Media campaign destroying forestry sector– GFC

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The peddling of misinformation by sections of the media has done a disservice to the forestry sector, Forestry Commissioner James Singh said as he debunked numerous claims that have been made in recent days.

In a series of articles, the Kaieteur Newspaper has attempted to discredit the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC), claiming that due to poor monitoring, Bai Shan Lin has been “raping” the country of its forestry resources.

On Monday, a high-level delegation led by Singh had a more than two-hour long press conference, as the GFC sought to set the record straight on the issue.

Shares transferred

It was explained that Haimorakabra was subject to a Joint Venture Arrangement in 2006 between Danny Chan and the original holder Roy Kharie; however, by July 2007, Chan transferred all the shares in Haimorakabra to the Chairman of Bai Shan Lin, Chu Wenze.

These transactions were conducted prior to the Forest Act of 2009, which now requires companies to seek GFC’s approval before entering into joint venture arrangements or transfers.

But subsequent to the enactment of the 2009 Forest Act, three Joint Ventures were approved for the Chinese-owned company. Wood Associated Industries Company (WAICO) Joint Venture was approved in April 2009 with Bai Shan Lin and by August that year, the Chinese-owned company entered another agreement with Sherwood Forrest Inc.

Kwebanna Wood Products Inc Joint Ventures was approved in April 2014 with Bai Shan Lin.

The Commissioner of Forestry confirmed that the logging company has legal access to a total of 627,072 hectares. “Of these, 344,849 hectares are State Forest Exploratory Permits (SFEP). They have to complete an ESIA, a Forestry Inventory and a Business Plan to the satisfaction of the EPA and the GFC before these are recommended for a conversion of a Transfer Sales Agreement (TSA),” Singh explained.

It was further explained that 274,053 hectares was issued as TSAs under Joint Ventures Agreements and 8170 hectares has been issued as State Forest Permissions. Contrary to some articles published in the media of wide-scale overharvesting by Bai Shan Lin, Singh said the logging company has unutilised quota in several of the concessions in 2013 and 2014. It was explained that in 2013, Bai Shan Lin in collaboration with its Joint Ventures partners; Haimorakabra Logging Company, Kwebana Wood Productions Inc, Puruni Wood Products Inc and the Wood Associated Industries, did not utilise 59 per cent of the allotted quota, while the unutilised quota for 2014 stands at 83 per cent.

The National Log Policy 2009 reflects a progressively higher rate of export commission, but it does not prohibit the exploration of logs, including Crabwood and Locust. “There is no ban on the export of Crabwood and Locust,” he explained.

Kaieteur News has capitalised on the use of pictures to support its arguments. Using several of those same pictures, the Commissioner of Forestry separated the facts from the myths.

Alluding to a picture which showed a long line of Bai Shan Lin trucks parked along one of the trails in Kwakwani, Singh explained that logging trucks are usually parked along the roadside during rainfall until the road

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is reasonably dry before continuing its journey. He added too that logs are transported at nights as well not because a company is engaging in any form of illegality, but because there is often reduced traffic and less wear and tear.

"Anyone who is familiar with forestry and forestry operations, this is going to absolutely be no surprise to them. This is normal for the forestry sector," he posited.

He made it clear that the logs being transported were harvested within the approved areas in 2012 and 2013.

Singh said too that other pictures depicted approved camp site and road network. "These are standard requirements for any forest operation. The presence of logging equipment is not evidence of Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) not being practiced."

He said too that some of the pictures showed logs that do not belong to Bai Shan Lin while in other cases; pictures depicted thousands of logs that belonged not only to Bai Shan Lin through Joint Ventures arrangements, but other companies.

Regulations

Questioned whether Bai Shan Lin had breached laws or regulations governing the forestry sector, Singh said infractions were primarily procedural ones that had no effect on the environment.

According to him, there is a robust monitoring system in place with 39 forest stations established throughout the country, equipped with 220 forest rangers. While admitting that some forest rangers would have become errant, Singh said the majority of the forestry officers conduct themselves in a professional manner as they enforce the laws governing the sector.

He said too that independent Auditors (2013/2014) verified compliance with GFC guidelines for harvesting, processing and export. "Satellite imagery of the entire country at 5m resolution showed that deforestation/forest degradation due to forestry activities was 353 hectares out of a total of 16,618 hectares for the country," he further pointed out. (svetlanam@guyanatimesgy.com)

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