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A senior councillor in Papua demanded on Monday that National Police Headquarters investigate the involvement of police personnel in massive illegal logging in the easternmost province of Indonesia. "There have been reports that police personnel have been involved in the illegal logging. National Police Headquarters must confirm whether the reports are true or are merely rumors," said Komarudin Watubun, the deputy speaker of the Papua provincial council.

The statement came after the Papua provincial police detained at least 25 people accused of involvement in illegal logging in the province. They were, among others, Papua forestry office director Marthen Kayoi and West Irian forestry office director Marten Luther Rumadas, a director of PT Wapoga Mutiara Timber, Tan Eng Kwee, the firm's operations manager, Agustinus Joumilena, and the firm's general manager, Tang Tung Hwong.

All but Marten Luther are being detained at Papua Provincial Police Headquarters. Marten himself is being detained for questioning at the Sorong Regental Police Headquarters.

Komarudin said that the provincial council had established a special committee to investigate rampant illegal logging in Papua. The committee had met various parties recently to discuss how to stop the practice. It is believed that committee members have met representatives of Papuan non-governmental organizations (NGOs), customs and excise officials, immigration officials and Papua forestry office officials.

"The committee will meet the chief of the Papua Provincial Police, Insp. Gen. Dodi Sumantyan, on Tuesday to discuss the problem of illegal logging," said Komarudin, who chairs the special committee.

The police have just launched Operation *Hutan Lestari* (sustainable forest) to halt widespread illegal logging in Papua. The operation was launched after two NGOs -- the Britain-based Environmental Investigation Agency and its Indonesian partner Telapak revealed their findings that Malaysian businessmen along with Chinese and Hong Kong companies were collaborating with the Indonesian military and government officials to smuggle 300,000 cubic meters per month of Merbau timber from Indonesia to China.

So far during Operation *Hutan Lestari*, the police have

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confiscated 40,679 cubic meters of logs and 5,669 cubic meters of processed timber.

Separately, a joint police and forest ranger team in Pekanbaru seized 12 trucks on Sunday and Monday carrying hundreds of cubic meters of undocumented timber of various species.

The seizures were made separately on various streets in Pekanbaru city between Sunday afternoon and dawn on Monday, said Sahnun, the director of the forest ranger unit at the Riau Natural Resources Conservation Board (BKSDA).

The logs and wood chips had been taken from the Rimbang Bukit Conservation area and Baling Bukit area in Kuantan Singingi regency, Sahnun quoted the truck drivers as saying.

The latest seizures came after the joint team apprehended a trailer truck carrying 32 cubic meters *kulim* timber on Pekanbaru-Perawang street in Pekanbaru city last Tuesday.

The *kulim* timber, which is reportedly worth billions of rupiah, was taken from the Tesso Nilo National Park in Riau province. During questioning, the truck driver admitted that the timber was to be transported to Bagansiapi-api city, Rokanhilir regency for boat construction.

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