

A team set up to conduct the investigations will consist of officials from the Forestry Ministry, Environment Ministry, National Police, the Attorney General's Office, the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) and the Judicial Mafia Taskforce.

"The main target is owners of illegal plantations and mining firms," Darori, director general of forest protection and conservation at the Forestry Ministry, told The Jakarta Post on Wednesday.

"The KPK will investigate the possibility of corruption by regents or mayors issuing permits. It will also look into abuses of power by local authorities."

The 1999 Forestry Law requires that permits for the conversion of forests for business purposes pass through the Forestry Ministry.

The 2007 government regulation gives authority to the local administration to oversee and enforce the law on illegal activities in the forest.

"It seems local administrations have failed to investigate booming illegal plantations and mining firms since they have only processed a handful of cases," Darori said.

He said that hundreds of plantations and mines in forested areas secured business permits only from the local administrations and have been categorized as illegal under the forestry law.

He said that East Kalimantan's forestry office found 181 mining firms and 42 plantations operating illegally in the province.

"In Central Kalimantan, some 960,000 hectares of forest area have been converted into mines and plantations since the reform era," he said.

"Illegal operations are also rampant in West Kalimantan, Riau, Jambi and Sumatra."

Darori's office claimed to have arrested nine people in Sumatra, including one with German citizenship, running oil palm plantations without permits.

He said the team would first map plantations and mining companies from the air to look at conditions in the field.

"We are still waiting for reports from local administrations. If they don't report us the plantations or mining companies in their area, the KPK will investigate the administrations' involvement," he said.

Darori admitted that in the past, the target was mostly on the low-ranking staffs in the field, such as drivers or workers. "But now, we target the owners. It is not difficult to trace them," he said.

Minister Zulkifli earlier said some two million hectares of forests had been illegally converted into oil palm plantations, mostly in Kalimantan and Sumatra.

The government is currently revising a 2005 presidential instruction on illegal logging. The draft then expanded the definition of violations including illegal mining and forest encroachment