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KERATAN SURAT KHABAR

SURAT KHABAR	:	NEW STRAITS TIMES			
TARIKH	:	12.07.22	MUKA SURAT	:	8
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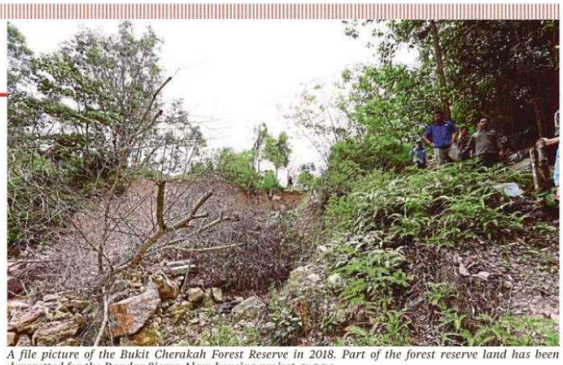
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HOME TO ENDANGERED SPECIES

BUKIT CHERAKAH DEGAZETTEMENT CHALLENGED

State govt acted unlawfully in excising forest land without prior notice, claims NGO

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A file picture of the Bukit Cherakah Forest Reserve in 2018. Part of the forest reserve land has been degazetted for the Bandar Sierra Alam housing project. FILE PIC

THE Shah Alam Community Forest Society (SACFS) will challenge the degazettement of 406.2ha of land in the Bukit Cherakah Forest Reserve.

"We feel that the state government is acting unlawfully in excising the land without prior notice, without public inquiry and without any replacement area," said the green group's secretary Dr Teckwyn Lim.

This was following Selangor Forestry Department director Datuk Ahmad Fadzil Abdul Majid's statement that a notice on the degazettement was issued on May 5.

SACFS rejected his explanation that the land was excised after taking into consideration the views from the Selangor State Legal Advisory Chamber.

"The land, covering 406.22 hectares, includes a wildlife corridor that we had proposed as a community forest (Shah Alam Commnity Forest).

"The forest here is still vibrant. Each weekend, thousands of hikers trek through the area. This forest is still home to endangered species of wildlife, including tapirs, gibbons and hornbills.

"We estimate that there are at least three tapirs, based on camera-trapping carried out in February.



Dr Teckwyn Lim

"Fadzil's statement contradicts a claim by Tourism, Environment, Green Technology and Orang Asli Affairs Committee chairman Hee Loy Sian on Sept 24 last year.

"Hee claimed that the land had already been excised from the reserve in 2006. He refused to meet us to substantiate that claim.

"Now, it is clear that no excision was completed in 2006. Hee should apologise for misleading the public," added the group.

The group also hit out at the date of the degazettement, which was backdated to 2000, which Fadzil said was implemented after reviews from the Selangor State Legal Advisory Chamber.

"The latest move attempts to back-date the excision to Nov 20, 2000. Fadzil said this backdating was due to various factors that had caused the process to have been put on hold.

"He added that no public inquiry had been held because the approval had taken place before the requirement for such inquiries came into force in 2011.

"We find this position contradictory. If the excision process had been put on hold until this year, then the requirement for holding the public inquiry must still apply.

"Our lawyers advise us that there is no provision in the forestry law that allows the backdating of excision notifications."

SACFS said Fadzil did not address the legal requirement to replace the excised area, which had been in the law since 1984.

"We also stress that Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Amirudin Shari has a conflict of interest in the matter.

"The land in question is being cleared for the Bandar Sierra Alam housing project by the state-owned Selangor State Development Corporation (PKNS).

"Given this, SACFS calls on the menteri besar to halt the forest clearance. As required by law, a public inquiry should be held before the excision of the forest reserve is completed."

In June, thousands of people signed a petition to urge PKNS not to carry out development in the Shah Alam Community Forest. Currently, PKNS reportedly owns 121.4ha of the forest in Bandar Sierra Alam.

Earlier in May, PKNS and Universiti Teknologi Mara had also signed a MoU to preserve 34.52ha of the community forest.

The Bukit Cherakah Forest Reserve, that once spanned close to 10,000ha, is now less than 15 per cent of its former area.

Hee in September last year reportedly admitted that the size had shrunk to 1,298.86ha, compared with previously being 9,642ha in 1909, when it was first gazetted.