KERATAN SURAT KHABAR

SURAT KHABAR	:	STARMETRO			
TARIKH	:	23/10/2021 (SABTU)	MUKA SURAT	:	7
JABATAN	:	JAB.PERHUTANAN NEGERI SELANGOR			



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Citycism

When fate of forest reserves hangs in the balance

Conservation should be the common agenda for the state and people

PROTECTING forest reserves is an issue that constantly surfaces in the Greater Klang Valley as more and more people understand the importance of these green lungs to the ecosystem.

It has come to a point that stakeholders have to fight to prevent development from being approved by the authorities and to preserve a forest.

This was clear when the Selangor government retracted its decision to degazette 536.7ha of the Kuala Langat North Forest Reserve (KLNFR) for development following an uproar from various parties.

This is a solid example of the people's victory in stopping the degazetting of a forest.

However, not all forests are as fortunate.

Take Shah Alam Community Forest (SACF) for example.

SACF is part of the wider Bukit Cerakah Forest Reserve that was originally constituted on May 21, 1909 under the Selangor Forest Enactment.

Currently, 70% of SACF has been alienated for mixed commercial and residential development.

Conservation group SACF Society, however, found that there were no notifications in the Selangor government gazette to about SACF being degazetted, hence it should still hold a forest reserve status.



The mirror lake, known for its crystal-clear water, is one of the attractions at Shah Alam Community Forest.

However, state tourism, environment, green technology and Orang Asli affairs committee chairman Hee Loy Sian said that as the land title had been given to the private developers, it must be degazetted.

He also pushed the responsibility to the previous state government as the degazettement process was done before 2008.

With land titles being issued, Hee might have a point that the land had been degazetted, with or without a gazette notification.

It would be unlikely for the state government to heed the public's call to regazette the land as a forest reserve because it would involve repurchasing the land at the current market price, which would be hefty.

The most that the state government can do is to control the development at SACF and Bukit Cherakah.

No matter what the narrative SACF Society and the Selangor government tried to put forward to convince other parties about the forest status, the people's fight to protect SACF will continue until they can stop the development.

Such efforts by SACF Society and other NGOs championing the protection and preservation of forest reserves is indeed laudable, and they have faced years of struggle to get their voices across.

It thus begs the question, why do the *rakyat* have to fight to protect green areas in the state?

Isn't protecting green space a shared agenda between elected representatives and the people who voted them in as the government?

Degazetting forest reserves to make way for development has always been a thorny issue among Selangor folks, as seen in both SACF and KLNFR.

Although it is the state government's policy to replace forest reserves that are degazetted, by gazetting other areas as forest reserve, the landscape will never be the same and the value of the greenery that is taken away cannot be replaced.

Sooner or later, there will be no more forest to take.

My plea is just the same as everyone else's — let forest reserves remain as such.

At the same time, the state government should strive to create more green space without compromising them for the sake of development.

If only the lawmakers had a chance to visit SACF, perhaps they might realise the negative impact that development would bring to nature's beauty.