

Land clearing activities in Selangor stripping away precious greenery

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By YIP YOKE TENG

A DRIVE to Kajang or Rawang has become an upsetting experience, not because of the road conditions or traffic congestion, but the brown patches that have replaced most of the once-green hills there.

Upon entering the Cheras-Kajang Highway, motorists will be able to see land clearing activities taking place on the undulating hills in the distance. Ironically, this is the direction city folk take when heading to places such as Hulu Langat, Semenyih and Broga for some fresh air.

Similarly, when motorists drive along the North-South Expressway towards the supposedly greener areas on the fringes of the state such as Serendah and Bukit Beruntung, they will be greeted by row after row of land cleared for quarry, plantation or housing development.

"I am sad about what is happening around here," said Cheras resident Yong Boo Ying.

"Every now and then, I see the hills being cut for housing development or another large stretch being stripped bare of its greenery. This has been happening at an alarming rate over the past few years," she added.

Selayang MCA Youth chief Lee Li Yew said he was doubtful that the Selayang Municipal Council (MPS) was doing its part to monitor the land clearing along the North-South Expressway.

"Although these are private land, the clearing has to be watched closely. I noticed that the land has been cleared but no ground work has been done after that. I suspect they are chopping down the trees without approval," he said.

It may take detailed surveys to prove the land clearing activities are affecting the delicate balance of the eco-system but the flooding in the Klang Valley, that is occurring more frequently, is certainly a warning sign.

On the other hand, looking at existing laws and plans, there is no lack of clauses in place to ensure the



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localities, further supported by the need for sustainability assessment during the planning process and Local Agenda 21 that calls for public consultation.

On the national level, the National Physical Plan and National Urbanisation Policy monitor land use in order to attain sustainability.

However, looking at the situation, one is inclined to think these measures are only for show.

Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) Selangor branch committee member Lim Teck Wyn has given examples of insensitive development, some carried out without any regard for regulations.

He said the whole of Sungai Jelok Forest Reserve in Kajang had been replaced with rubber plantation in 2009. The 250ha forest reserve was a water catchment area for Sungai Jelok, a tributary of Sungai Langat.

“Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad pledged to keep 50% of Malaysia’s land area under forest cover at the first Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Some independent surveys show that it is already less than 50%. In Selangor, we have only 30% of the land left as forests,” he said.

He said in general, the state government had tried to protect forest reserves by stopping logging activities, but that the National Forestry Act 1984 allowed for forest reserves to be logged and replaced with plantation meant for timber production.

For example, in Sungai Jelok, the forest reserve is now used to plant latex timber clone rubber trees. The act has caused serious erosion and Kajang is being hit by floods at an unprecedented scale.

Apart from that, the East Klang Valley Expressway (EKVE) – the eastern stretch of the Kuala Lumpur Outer Ring road – will cut through the Ampang Forest Reserve, where the water catchment area and water intake point are situated, hence posing a threat to water resources in the Klang Valley, Lim said.

The forest reserve is part of the Selangor State Park gazetted in 2005, classified as Rank 1 Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) under the National Physical Plan and accorded the highest status of protection.

The EKVE concession was given to Ahmad Zaki Resources Bhd and an agreement was inked on Feb 13. The proposed 35.5km highway alignment would traverse through Hulu Gombak, Ampang and Hulu Langat Forest Reserves, linking the Kajang Silk Highway to the Karak Expressway.

Little known to Cheras folk, the area actually houses the Bukit Sungai Putih Wildlife Reserve located near the former Phoenix Plaza.

“This wildlife reserve was gazetted in the 1930s but no one is managing it.

“Over the years, parts and parcels of it have been taken for development,” he added.



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"This highway does not exist in the MPS local plan," he said, adding that this forest reserve was also the only place in the world where the rare Merawan Kancing tree was found and that the ongoing construction works had killed a good number of the saplings.

Therefore, the land clearing seen by motorists along the Cheras-Kajang Highway and the North-South Highway is certainly a cause for concern.

"We are already down to 30%. It is the Government's policy to protect the remaining forests and those entrusted and involved in the administration process must ensure this is done," Lim said, adding that the society will hold a press conference on Feb 26 to urge leaders from both political divides to make a green pledge.

"Also, an amendment was made in the Selangor State Forest Enactment two years ago, making public consultation mandatory if any part of a forest reserve is to be developed but such practice has yet to take place," Lim said.

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