

‘Stop development projects in Bukit Cerakah’

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By Kathleen Michael



The trail into Bukit Cerakah Forest Reserve next to Bukit Bayu is now a rocky hill after excavations by unknown parties. — Photos: LOW LAY PHON/The Star

FOUR non-governmental organisations want a moratorium on development projects within forested areas bordering the Bukit Cerakah Forest Reserve.

They comprise Association of Owners and Residents of Bukit Bayu, Malaysian Nature Society (MNS), Treat Every Environment Special (TrEES) and Global Environment Centre (GEC).

This is after residents found ongoing excavation activities at the entrance of the forest trail.

The development project being carried out near Bukit Bayu raised concerns among residents and neighbouring townships regarding its impact on their safety and security.

They fear the developments will increase human-wildlife conflict.



The entrance to the walking trail into Bukit Cerakah has been barricaded.

Bukit Bayu resident Nazri Elias said he heard explosions last month, but brushed it off, thinking it was fireworks.

He said residents saw barricades at the forest trail but thought it was done to prevent vehicles from entering the forest.

“We saw people doing work there, and the road had caved in where the walking trail was located,” he added.

At the site, residents were approached by construction workers who claimed they were appointed by a construction company to clear land in Bukit Cerakah for a housing project and that excavators and tractors would move in after Hari Raya.

Selangor Forestry Department visited the site and confirmed there was no machinery at the location.

Nazri said many people purchased houses in Bukit Bayu to be closer to nature.

“We have seen wild cats, dusky leaf monkeys and the *tapir*.



Residents and NGOs leading media personnel to view the damage in Bukit Cerakah.

“These animals never came close to our homes but after the excavations, I saw them scattered around,” he said, adding that residents feared the animals would lose their habitats.

The residents complained to Shah Alam City Council (MBSA), which pushed the onus to the Forestry Department and vice-versa.

Bukit Bayu residents association chairman Gobindran Krishna Murthy questioned why were there no notifications regarding the development project or signboard providing information at the site.

“The jungle trek used by residents and hikers will be destroyed because of the development,” he said.

Bukit Bayu residents said on June 12, the Petaling District Land Office informed them the area was a reserve land of Taman Botani Shah Alam and that no development plan was submitted.

The residents have also lodged a police report against the excavations.

GEC forest and coastal programme coordinator Nagarajan Rengasamy said the forest was the last remaining patch of lowland with mineral soil and an important water catchment area.

“Once it is destroyed, there will be erosions and unexpected outcomes leading to losses,” he explained.

He said the Selangor government introduced a moratorium on logging in the state years ago, and this should be extended to state and forest reserve land.

MNS executive director Shanmugaraj Subramaniam questioned how such development was allowed without a comprehensive environment management plan.

“Our research shows the area should be kept untouched as it is environmentally sensitive, where the impact of any development will have far-reaching consequences to the surroundings and people

living nearby.

“A social impact study should be conducted with an economic valuation of the ecosystem services to assess the project’s pros and cons.”

Shanmugaraj hoped the forest would be gazetted as a permanent forest reserve.



The trail into Bukit Cerakah has caved in following land-clearing activities.

TrEES director Leela Panikkar said preserving the lowland forest area did not mean hindering development.

“Retaining, restoring and preserving this priceless lowland forest in Selangor will make cities and towns around the forest safe, resilient and sustainable in the long run.

“Well-functioning lowland forest ecosystems have greater resilience to climate change, enhance economic and biodiversity benefits and will contribute towards sustainable development in Selangor,” she said.

Kota Anggerik assemblyman Najwan Halimi said the forest should not be touched, adding that the land status was unclear.

“We do not know what the plans are but I will bring this up with the state to gazette this area,” Najwan said.