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MEDIA STATEMENT

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Selangor Needs to Increase Its Commitment to Protect Forests

Despite the fact that the country's administration has changed and is now popularly known as 'Malaysia Baharu', however, the governance of forest resources, especially Permanent Reserved Forests (PRF) is still frustrating and worrying.

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) had anticipated that when the overall change in the system, pattern of administration and administrative policy of the 'Malaysia Baharu' is realized, the governance of forest resources, especially the PRF, will change but our expectation is yet to be met.

SAM's utmost concerns relating to the governance of forested areas in Selangor are:

- excision of parts of Permanent Reserved Forests (PRF) in the state;
- some existing PRFs were found to be neglected and thus degraded, becoming poor forests
- the destruction of the firefly habitat in State Land.

Excision of parts of PRF

SAM objects to the State Authority's proposal to excise PRF in the state of Selangor, including PRF that has been excised particularly since the state government has been administered by Pakatan Rakyat since 2008.

Several PRFs that have been excised are as follows:

| | Name of Permanent Reserved Forest | Area excised (hectares) |
|-----|--|--------------------------------|
| | HS = Hutan Simpan | |
| 1. | HS Bukit Cherakah | 3.41 |
| 2. | HS Sungai Buloh | |
| 3. | HS Bukit Sungai Puteh Utara | No information |
| 4. | HS Bukit Sungai Puteh Selatan | 29.982 |
| 5. | HS Hulu Langat | |
| 6. | HS Hulu Gombak | |
| 7. | HS Ampang | 106.65 |
| 8. | HS Rantau Panjang | (4 acres) |
| 9. | HS Ayer Hitam | 18,691 |
| 10. | HS Sungai Buloh | 1,2418 |
| 11. | HS Bukit Lagong | 28.3 |

SAM questions the justification and needs of the State Authority to repeal some of the PRF area and whether the State Authority has replaced all the excised areas based on provisions of the existing law.

One of the PRFs excised is part of Sungai Buloh (HS Sungai Buloh) in Petaling District covering an area of 1.2418 hectares.

HS Sungai Buloh is significant because it is the oldest PRF in Malaysia.

Since its establishment on 14 January 1898, from time to time, a large portion of the HS Sungai Buloh (original area covered 6,590ha) had been excised and sacrificed in the name of development.

At present HS Sungai Buloh has been reduced to merely 25ha only.

Hence the remaining area covering HS Sungai Buloh should be maintained as a natural heritage protection area.

Maintaining the existing hectareage of HS Sungai Buloh and all other PRF in the Klang Valley is very important because the forests here play a role in balancing the physical development with natural surroundings.

Physical development especially change in land use for urbanization is very rapid in the Klang Valley, whilst green lungs and zones are shrinking fast. Due to this, green house gas emissions are gradually increasing and impairing quality of life.

Several road accidents in the past and wildlife-human conflicts in this areas indicate that the PRF in Klang Valley especially outside the Titiwangsa Range “Central Forest Spine” forest complex which has become “forest island” is still a wildlife habitat including for totally protected wildlife.

The proposal to excise parts of PRFs in Selangor contravenes and not in congruence with one of the main strategies of the Selangor Forestry Department i.e. to maintain existing PRF and increase its area.

The proposal to excise parts of PRFs in Selangor is also in conflict of the goals and targets of the Peninsular Malaysia Forestry Department to achieve 5 million hectares of PRF cover.

In addition, the proposed excision of parts of PRFs in Selangor is not in line with the Federal Government’s 2019 budget recommendation to all State governments to take efforts to protect existing natural protected areas and to increase new protected areas.

In fact the State Government of Selangor was very avid and committed to ensure its natural heritage and green legacy are preserved. Former Menteri Besar Dato’ Seri Azmin Ali had stated that Selangor should not be comfortable with the current hectareage of PRF despite more than 30% of the land area of the State is under forest cover and that it needs to be expanded.

PRFs that are neglected and have become poor/degraded forests

PRFs that were found to have been neglected and have now become degraded and poor forests are HS Rantau Panjang and HS Bukit Tarek.

Most of the areas in both forest reserves are not managed by the principles of sustainable forest management.

Destruction of firefly habitat on State Land

SAM is concerned of the destruction of the firefly habitat on State Land in Kampung Kuantan, Kuala Selangor.

The destruction of the firefly habitat due to agriculture and sand extraction activities along the Selangor River has affected the firefly population and subsequently the tourism sector.

Therefore SAM hopes that the Selangor State Authority will:

- consider not to further excise parts of PRFs in Selangor, especially in the Klang Valley;
- implement forest management principles in PRF areas in Selangor that have become poor /degraded forests; and
- gazette firefly habitat in portions of Selangor River reserve / riparian zone as a protected area, giving it PRF status to ensure it has 'security of tenure'.

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