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Degazetting of KLNFR highly irresponsible

Only a few hours ago, SAM sadly learnt that the Selangor state government has decided to continue with its proposal to degazette the Kuala Langat North Forest Reserve (KLNFR) to make way for commercial development on what is now one of the last remaining peat forests in the south of Selangor.

We are extremely outraged by this. At a time when we are facing a climate crisis, the Selangor government's stance is highly irresponsible.

First, the decision goes against various international commitments that our federal government has made on climate change, biodiversity protection and the rights of indigenous peoples. As a peatland forest alone, KLNFR is valuable carbon and biodiversity-rich ecosystem. Its conversion will lead to a high level of carbon emissions and biodiversity loss, including critically endangered plant and animal species. Then, to the west of the KLNFR, there are several indigenous communities who are dependent on the well-being of the forested ecosystem.

Second, the decision also goes against the country's own physical and development plans. KLNFR qualifies as a Rank 1 Environmentally Sensitive Area under the National Physical Plan 3, which prohibits its conversion or development. The Selangor Structure Plan 2035 aims to ensure that at least 32 per cent of Selangor will remain under forest cover. The Kuala Langat Local Plan 2030 itself has categorised the KLNFR as a no-development zone.

Third, the decision also goes against the overwhelming resolution of the Selangor State Assembly in November 2020, where it unanimously passed a motion urging the state government to preserve all the remaining gazetted forests in the state.

Fourth, members of the public have strongly expressed their objections to the proposal. The Department of Forestry received more than 45,000 objections. An online petition has garnered around 130,000 signatures. The #hutanpergimana campaign on social media in October 2020 tracked that nearly 1,500 persons had sent protest emails to several or all elected legislative representatives in Selangor.

A Selangor state exco has reportedly claimed that there is now a reduction of 54 per cent in the area to be degazetted, from 931 hectares to 534 hectares, as the state government had taken into consideration the objections that have been raised. However, all such protests did not ask for a reduction in the size of the area to be degazetted. They demanded that the degazetting exercise to be cancelled altogether.

The Selangor state's unbending stance has to be condemned, and flies against principles of good environmental and social governance.

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