



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Press Statement

4 September 2021

Adopt a two-prong approach to green the country

The Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) welcomes the government's 100 Million Tree-Planting Campaign 2021-2025 as a move to green the country but it has to ensure that the task should not be given to any private companies in handling it.

The campaign should empower the people to get involved in the planting under the supervision of the Forestry Department. In this way much money can be saved besides achieving the campaign's objectives.

Greening the country with the tree-planting effort alone is insufficient if deforestation is allowed to continue unabated. The campaign will be seen a mere whitewash for Malaysia which has earned its distinction of "having the highest rate of forest loss" among 10 countries worldwide that are reducing their forest cover.

A study by the University of Maryland study found that some 230 million hectares of forest was lost between 2000 and 2012. Deforestation is the cause for reduced biodiversity, greenhouse gas emissions, disrupted water cycles, and increased soil erosion.

The campaign should adopt a two-prong approach – increase tree-planting of the right species at the right location while simultaneously clamping down on deforestation – which otherwise will be futile. Such move will assist people to learn to appreciate and take ownership of trees in the community.

To address the root cause of deforestation, the government has to make the respective states accountable for any deforestation activity – legal or illegal – taking place. It would be defeating the objectives of tree-planting if the states are allowed to degazette forest reserves and or allowing trees to be felled with little monitoring.

Currently under the National Forestry Act, any product from a Permanent Forest Estate or other State land are considered the property of the State but the products may only be extracted with a proper license. Thus, it is under the State's jurisdiction and one way for the federal government to control deforestation is to place conditions on federal aid to the respective States.

Laws pertaining to forestry and environment must be tightened. It must be ensured that there are checks and balances to prevent an abuse of power because governments – federal or state – are merely the custodians of the assets of the land. They are ultimately answerable to the people.

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