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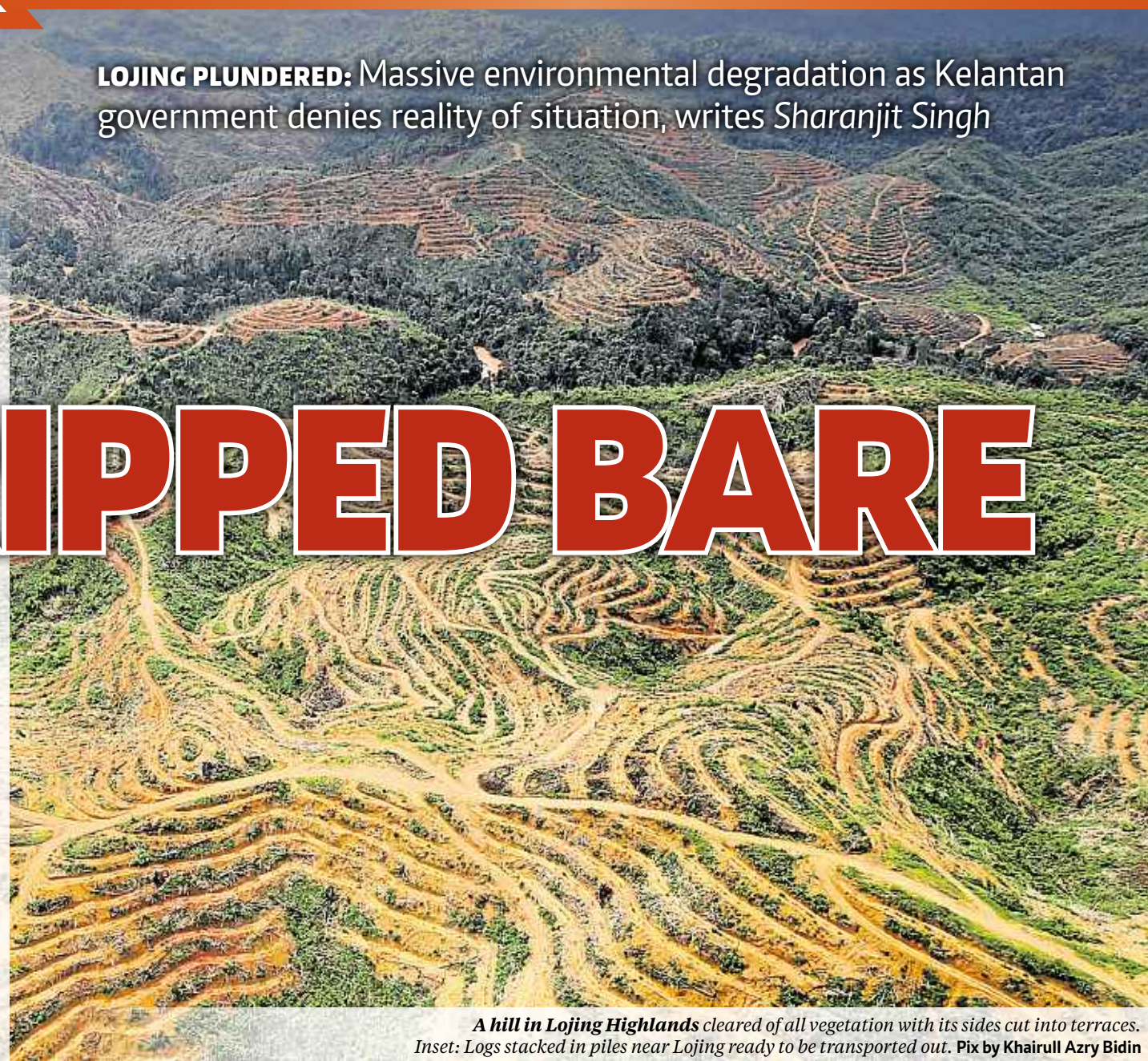


LOJING PLUNDERED: Massive environmental degradation as Kelantan government denies reality of situation, writes Sharanjit Singh

STRIPPED BARE

- State exco member insists there is no logging in the area because 'there is no timber left there'
- Plans drawn up for townships in an area where the rivers are the colour of 'teh tarik'
- NGOs demand transparency from state government

→ **REPORTS ON PAGES 4 & 5**



A hill in Lojing Highlands cleared of all vegetation with its sides cut into terraces. Inset: Logs stacked in piles near Lojing ready to be transported out. Pix by Khairull Azry Bidin

DAP: IT'S NASHA WHO IS INSINCERE → **PRIME PAGE 9**

QUAKE TRIGGERS PACIFIC TSUNAMI, 5 KILLED → **WORLD PAGE 29**

NICOL FALLS IN OHIO → **SPORT PAGE 46**

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Venue : Cafe Oriental

RM55nett - (Adult)

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PRIME NEWS

14 face rap over land clearings

LOJING PROJECT:

Developers carry out projects without EIA reports

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FOURTEEN errant developers have so far been taken to court for flouting environmental rules in Lojing, Kelantan.

Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Douglas Uggah Embas said the developers — nine of whom had carried out projects without submitting Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) reports — had to be taken to task for damaging the environment.

He said the environment authorities found that massive damage had been done to the rich flora and fauna in the Lojing area because of unlawful land development work.

“Of the 14 cases, nine developers had failed to come up with EIA reports while the other five had EIA reports, but had failed to follow its mitigation plans.

“We are monitoring the situation and will not hesitate to take action against any other developer who fails to adhere to the law,” he told the *New Straits Times* yesterday.

Uggah was commenting on rampant land clearing activities in Lojing, which neighbours the famous tourism spot of Cameron High-



Aerial view showing massive land clearing activities at the Lojing area in Kelantan. Pix by Zaman Huri Isa

lands in Pahang.

The minister said approval of any land development project rested with the state government.

He said while projects on land, with an area of 50ha and above, required an EIA, which is enforced by the Environment Department,

projects on smaller land areas were under the local authorities.

“EIA serves as a guideline to see the impact of a proposed land development project on the environment, thus enabling the authorities to come up with a mitigation plan.

“This way, we can ensure that the environment is not damaged or polluted. But, for works on areas smaller than 50ha, the local authorities are in charge of monitoring the projects and ensuring that they don’t damage the environment.”

Last week, the NST reported rampant jungle clearing, hill cutting and river pollution covering massive areas had been carried out. An aerial survey revealed that huge swathes of highland had been stripped bare of trees, with signs of recent clearings.

Orang Asli feel brunt of project

GUA MUSANG: The tranquil life in the jungle has now turned into an endless nightmare for 63-year old Orang Asli, Alang Terawas.

His people of the Teminar community, who reside in the Seng Sang village here, once lived peacefully by utilising the resources provided by nature around them.

But not anymore. Sungai Belatop, the river next to the village, has become muddy while the jungle, where they used to hunt and collect forest produce, has become barren.

“This village is the nearest to Lojing and the river flowing from the mountain is the main source of water for residents here.

“But now, the river is becoming more polluted because of the uncontrolled agricultural activities,” said Alang, who lives in the village with other 50 families.

Since 1995, the Kelantan government had allowed several companies to clear the surrounding area to grow vegetables on land considered

as Orang Asli customary land.

The river started to become polluted and the community had to depend on *air tandak*, or water from the hills nearby. If the agricultural activities were not controlled, Alang said he feared that the springs nearby would also suffer the same fate as the river.

“Only this water is left for us to drink. Can you imagine if this water, too, is polluted?”

“We cannot go hunting any more. We also cannot catch the fish.

“What are we going to eat? Please have pity on us.”

Alang said the villagers had to venture further into other forests to look for forest produce, such as bamboo and rattan, but their income would be

down to just about RM50 per month.

He said he was thankful that the Federal Government, through the Orang Asli Affairs Department, had helped by building houses.

“They built *tandak* (pond) in the clean water area and distributed water through pipes to our village.

“They also built a community centre and new houses for us,” he said, adding that the state government did not seem to be concerned about their welfare and problems.

To make matters worse, Alang said his people faced another dilemma when the state government refused to grant them their land titles.



“We cannot go hunting any more. We also cannot catch the fish. What are we going to eat.”
Alang Terawas
Orang Asli



Sungai Belatop, which the Teminar Orang Asli community relied on for their daily use, has been muddied by the rampant Lojing land clearings nearby.

He claimed that sometime ago, the state government had promised to give them the grants to their land and houses, but reneged on this without any apparent reason.

“We need the grants to prove that we have the right to live here. Without the grants, it means that houses built in this village can be seized by the state government at any time.

Young People Against Corruption (Ombak) president Wan Khairul Ihsan Wan Mohamad said the Depart-

ment of Environment should be stringent in handling Lojing’s development.

The Kelantan-based non-governmental organisation believed that all development projects in the area did not have Environmental Impact Assessment reports.

“The state government is only concerned about making profits without thinking about the consequences to the Orang Asli community.” **Bernama**

PRIME NEWS

'There's no illegal logging in Lojing'

IN DENIAL: Kelantan govt claims area all logged out before 1990

**SHARANJIT SINGH
AND
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RAMPANT jungle clearing, hill cutting and river pollution covering massive areas of the Lojing Highlands have continued unabated, a *New Straits Times* aerial survey revealed.

Huge swathes of highlands have been stripped bare of trees, and there are signs that the clearings had taken place just recently, despite the state government's contention that Lojing had been cleared of timber before 1990.

Rivers are clogged with earth and the once clear waters are now the colour of teh tarik.

Frustratingly, despite concerns over the potential of irreversible environmental damage in the area, the Kelantan government has brushed aside these "unfounded" fears, and labelled them as nothing more than just a "misunderstanding".

State Islamic Development, Education and Dakwah Committee chairman Datuk Mohd Amar Nik

Abdullah, when confronted with questions about the environmental degradation, admitted that land in Lojing — bordering Pahang's Cameron Highlands — was being cleared to make way for farms and mixed-development projects.

He denied that any logging was going on there.

"There is no logging being done in Lojing as claimed by the media because there is no timber left there. The area was logged out even before we (Pas) came to power in 1990.

"There are only bamboo and small trees left and they were cleared as the area is being developed to be planted with oil palm and rubber trees."

Amar said the state government had given the green light to several companies and agencies to clear land at Lojing Highlands and the projects started "a few years ago".

However, contrary to his statement, clear signs of ongoing hill cutting and land clearing are going on at the highlands.

Bulldozers could be seen clearing the hillslopes and there were also signs of recent landslides which occurred close to the Gua Musang

highway. Amar said the state government had given land in Gua Musang and Lojing to state agencies, including Kelantan State Economic Development Corporation (SEDC), Kelantan Islamic Foundation (YIK) and Kelantan Darulnaim Foundation (Yakin), which later leased the land to a few companies.

He added that development of the land was needed because Lojing was located on high land and bordered Cameron Highlands.

"For Gua Musang, the setting up of the new town will boost tourism in the vicinity."

Amar said the state government was constructing two new towns in Sigar and Pos Brooke, and plans have also been drawn up for resorts in the area.

Pressed on the logging taking place in Lojing, he said the issue of illegal logging highlighted by the media might be a "misunderstanding". Amar said the logging could have been taking place at another area near Gua Musang.

"The media must give details on the area involved before they expose it to the public.

"In Gua Musang, there are few



projects that the state government had carried out and they include those set aside for the 'Ladang Rakyat Projek'," he said.

Commenting on the same issue, state deputy forestry director (de-

velopment division) Mohd Fauzi Abu Bakar said the department had yet to receive any reports of illegal logging.

He welcomed those with information to inform the department.

This is a brutal rape of our natural resources

IREAD somewhere before that the Kelantan government has been managing its forests in much the same way a monkey might fly a plane.

It is said that the rate of deforestation in Kelantan is four times higher than the average for the whole country.

Greed and desperation to fill its coffers from logging revenue is said to have contributed to the unprecedented scale of destruction taking place in the east coast state.

It is no surprise that stories about massive logging in areas around Gua Musang and the Lojing Highlands have been reported continuously in the past few years.

Such news has been regurgitated over and over again to the point that the impact of what is happening in Kelantan escapes most people, including me.

More often than not, such stories were dismissed as just another report on hill clearing and trees being chopped down.

"What to do? These things are happening all over the place. It cannot be all that bad" would have

been the typical reaction from most of us when yet another story on environmental destruction is splashed on the front pages.

Admittedly, my train of thought was along the same lines prior to boarding the helicopter which was about to fly me to Lojing. I was to see for myself what is happening at the highlands which I had only heard and read about until now.

Taking off from Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport, Subang, on a cloudy day, we could only fly under the clouds at a height of 610m, as the Ecureuil made its way towards Batu Caves and onwards to Cameron Highlands.

The ride could not have been smoother and uneventful as we took in the city view flying out of Subang, towards the first "way-point" at Batu Caves.

After that, it was green all the way as we headed northeast towards Cameron Highlands.

Then, the pilot's voice crackled over the headset.

"Are you guys ready to see this?" he asked as the helicopter crossed Cameron Highlands into Lojing.

From a vista of green hills minutes before, we were suddenly met by a stretch of hills that had been stripped naked.

Gone were the trees.

The landscape was nothing but red earth, with rows after rows of sheds used for strawberry cultivation.

In some areas, the hills were covered with "black spots", a clear sign that open burning of the jungle had taken place.

"It is because the area could not be logged, so they cleared it using the cheapest and fastest way possible, open burning," the pilot said.

This kind of destruction, he added, has been going on for many years, but he said he noticed that it had accelerated in the last

one or two years.

He then banked the helicopter to one side and flew low over an area where Sungai Brooke snaked its way around the highlands.

I am sure we have all seen dirty rivers.

But have you ever seen one so damaged that the water is not what water in the middle of a jungle should look like?

Instead of a clear stream like what we saw in the forest en route to Lojing, it was the colour of teh tarik. This is the fate that has befallen all, that's right, all the streams in the Lojing area.

Just when I thought it couldn't get any worse, the helicopter pulled up as we climbed to 1,219m and hovered over a hill which had been cleared and flattened, with its sides cut into terraces.

It was obvious that a key policy set by the National Forestry Council that no logging should be carried out in forests at an elevation of 1,000m above sea level and above, had been breached.

We also saw signs of a fresh landslide along the Gua

Musang highway.

After almost 30 minutes of surveying the Lojing Highlands, we proceeded to another row of hills closer to Gua Musang.

Here, signs of widespread, ongoing logging activities were evident.

As we flew lower, we could see logs being transferred onto lorries.

Stacks of logs were piled near the hillsides waiting to be transported out.

This, I guess, is what happens, when more than 20,000ha of pristine highland forest is marked to be raped, as was described by Kelantan elected representatives themselves back in 2007.

The authorities in Kelantan may call what is happening at Lojing a necessary sacrifice for its "Ladang Rakyat Projek" but this is a brutal rape of our natural resources.

So, what plausible explanation can there be for this travesty?

And please, don't even try to suggest that this happened because the highlands are like a woman who did not cover up properly.



Sharanjit Singh
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PRIME NEWS

'Probe if Kelantan has flouted environment law'

SHOCKING: Minister appalled at extent of damage to nature

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THE extensive logging and development activities, which have been sanctioned by the state government in South-

ern Kelantan, especially in Dabong, Lojing and Gua Musang, have damaged the environment and resources, said state Umno liaison committee chief Datuk Mustapa Mohamed.

The international trade and industry minister said the authorities involved, including the state environment and land and mines departments must explain whether the activities were carried out according to regulations.

Speaking after watching a video prepared by a non-governmental organisation at a dinner with bloggers on Sunday night, Mustapa said it was clear that there had

been infringements of several rules.

"As a minister, I am shocked at the extent of damage that had taken place. Obviously, many things are not known to the ordinary people. This must be made public as we should take care of our natural resources for the future generations."

Orang Muda Berpadu Anti Korupsi (Ombak) president Wan Khairul Ihsan Wan Muhammad, who prepared the video, said the state government should clarify the size of land allowed for the development and the status of the land, whether it was given for log-

ging, agriculture or replanting of oil palm and rubber.

"It involves thousands of acres. The activities have been carried out after 2006. We hope the state government will give the actual figures involved."

"If the state executive council, including the menteri besar and his deputy, are not aware about the activities, we would show them the areas or give them the information that we have collected."

Wan Khairul Ihsan said the development work had caused irreparable damage to the ecosystem and environment, besides displacing the local villagers.

Orang Asli host CNY open house

MUADZAM SHAH: Unbeknownst to many, most of the 2,000 people in Bukit Serok Orang Asli resettlement scheme near here also celebrate Chinese New Year.

Although there is no lion dance and the sound of firecrackers, the auspicious event is made special with open houses hosted by many of the villagers, who are descendents of marriage between the Chinese and Orang Asli.

True to the spirit of 1Malaysia, the Orang Asli in the area celebrate Hari Raya Aidilfitri, as about 30 per cent of them are Muslims.

"In the 1960s and 1970s, many of the people here married into the Chinese community but now our children prefer the Malay Muslims," said 50-year-old Chek Long Ah Kau, whose paternal and maternal ancestry can be traced back to the Chinese and the Orang Asli.

Since most of them did not embrace any religion, Chek Long said the community would join their relatives and neighbours in major celebrations, including Chinese New Year, Hari Raya Aidilfitri and Christmas.

"We respect each other's belief and halal food are served to our Muslim friends," said Chek Long, whose daughter is a Muslim.

Azizah Yusof, 51, said for Chinese New Year, the people in the settlement would hold a reunion dinner for their families on the eve of the important day. Similar to the Chinese culture, she said, they would also hang red lanterns and other decorative items for the joyous celebration.

"We also serve Mandarin oranges, cakes and traditional *kuih* on Chinese New Year. The young ones will also receive *ang pow* from us," said the mother of five, whose father is a Chinese.

Azizah said sometimes, the villagers would organise a joint open house.

"Together with our guests, we will sing, dance and enjoy the food till the wee hours. There will be live music and karaoke session," said Azizah, whose children married Malays, Chinese and Orang Asli.

On the types of food served during Chinese New Year, Azizah said many of the Orang Asli preferred traditional Chinese and Malay delicacies, including steamed chicken and beef rendang.

Zizal Harim, 23, said he would bring his wife and 18-year-old son to visit relatives and friends on the first two days of the Chinese New Year.

"I used to get a lot of *ang pow* before I got married. Now, it's my son's turn to receive them from relatives and friends."



Members of the **Royal Malaysia Police band** entertaining visitors at the **Royal Museum** in Kuala Lumpur on Sunday. Bernama pic

Royal Museum adds weekend shows

KUALA LUMPUR: The royal rooms of the old Istana Negara are not only major attractions at the Royal Museum but visitors also will get the opportunity to enjoy cultural and musical performances on weekends, beginning Sunday.

Malaysian Museums Department

director-general Datuk Ibrahim Ismail to make the Royal Museum more attractive, various programmes would be carried during the weekends, such as silat and band performance.

"The programmes will be performed by bands from the police

force, army or high schools," he said after the Royal Malaysia Police's band performance at the museum here on Sunday.

Visitor Murthi Supramaniam said he was happy because he not only got to visit the historical place, he also had the opportunity to watch

the performance.

"The experience is incredible." The museum, officiated by Information, Communications and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim on Feb 1, is open to public everyday, from 9am to 5pm. **Berna**

PRIME NEWS

Govt aid 'helps to boost economy'

KUALA LUMPUR: Financial assistance by the government would have multiplier effects on the economy, regardless of the amount.

In reacting to the government's move to extend the eligibility group for the BRIM aid, Deputy Minister in Prime Minister's Department, Datuk Ahmad Maslan said, in addition to helping those in need, the move would also spur economic growth.

"Money in the economy, even as little as RM1, will have multiplier effects that can propel the country's Gross Domestic Product growth in the long run.

"In the case of those who live in rural areas, this form of aid would encourage spending and boost sales in places such as sundry shops and wet markets. This certainly will move the local economy."

Maslan said contrary to claims by the opposition that one-off payments to the people would not be helpful, the government was positive such assistance would benefit the masses.

"In my opinion, it is a simple and creative economic solution."

Private sector employee, Ismail Ishak, 30, said BRIM, and other such help, were effective in ensuring such allocations reach the intended target groups.

"While I think it is good, perhaps a quarterly or annual aid allowance is better than a one-off payment."

'Party flags a hindrance'

KUALA TERENGGANU: No party flags are to be erected or attached in any way on bridges and roundabouts in Terengganu even on the polling day, said Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Ahmad Said.

"The enforcement is immediate, all district authorities should start to confiscate any flags, regardless of the party.

"This concerns safety of road users. Should the flags fall on the road, it can cause accidents, and flags at roundabouts can block views, also another unnecessary cause of unwanted incidents," he said at Wisma Darul Iman here yesterday after chairing the state exco meeting.

"Proprietors can be fined because the law regarding the matter is there, but for now, authorities will seize any flags found at bridges or roundabouts in the state."



Large scale logging and farming in Lojing, Kelantan has led to extensive deforestation.

'State govt to blame for Lojing deforestation'

ASHAMED: Kelantan organisation head wants laws enforced for a start

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THE massive environmental damage in Lojing, Gua Musang, is the result of neglect by the state government to enforce relevant laws to protect natural heritage, the Kelantan Patron Of Professionals (Kelpro) said.

Its president Nor Azli Ahmad said a responsible government would have stringently applied local by-laws to manage its natural resources, such as forests, land, water, rivers and minerals, on top of federal regulations pertaining to environmental preservation.

He said media reports on extensive deforestation in Lojing and degradation of the environment had highlighted how poorly local law enforcement had been carried out.

"To the naked eye, pictures of flattened hills, cleared land and brown-coloured rivers give the impression that large-scale logging and farming have been carried out without compliance with the environmental guidelines."

He was responding to the recent press coverage on massive land-clearing in Gua Musang.

Nor Azli, a lawyer, said the state government should order the local authorities to enforce Sections 69 and 71 of the Local Government Act 1976 to safeguard the quality of rivers and surrounding areas.

Under Section 69, he said, those who were found to have caused damage to, or polluted, a river or its banks were liable to be fined up to RM2,000 or face one year's imprisonment or both upon conviction.

The local authorities, he said, could also use Section 71 to compel the offenders to pay the cost of rehabilitating polluted rivers.

"It should be the role of the state government to protect the natural heritage of the people. But, we see that the local authorities have not monitored or managed the environment systematically.

"Kelpro wishes to call on the state government to stop the logging and farming operations which have directly affected the natural ecosystem in the state."

On the issue of land, Nor Azli said it was a moral obligation of the state government to give priority to the pioneers who had opened up jungles for subsistence farming when awarding land titles.

He said cases of people's land with orchards and smallholdings being taken over by the state government exposed another inefficiency of the authorities in processing land applications.

"Some settlers have paid de-

posits to the land office as an initial procedure in applying for the land titles but poor administration has led to the documents going missing."

He said those affected could take up their cases with the land office by submitting evidence, such as deposit receipts, pictures and other proof, that they were the ones who opened the land to claim their right to the property.

It was reported on Tuesday that the Barisan Nasional assemblymen for Paloh and Nenggiri respectively, Datuk Norzula Mat Diah and Mat Yusoff Abdul Ghani, had expressed disappointment with the state government for depriving the poor from owning land in Gua Musang.

Recently, several groups of people had also been reported to have staged protests as they claimed that their land had been taken over by the state government and turned into Ladang Rakyat, or people's estate projects.

Exco: We will probe into land clearing

KOTA BARU: The state government will investigate the massive land-clearing for development in southern Kelantan which has been highlighted in the media, executive councillor Datuk Dr Mohamed Fadhli Hassan said yesterday.

Fadhli, who is the state information, information development and science and technology committee chairman, said facts, including pictures in newspapers, had to be verified first as the state government could not determine the location where the photographs were taken.

He said Deputy Menteri Besar Datuk Ahmad Yakob would call the relevant departments to ascertain whether there had been encroachment and illegal activities.

"It involves many parties and it is better for us to leave it to them to investigate the reports," he said when met at his office here yesterday.

He was commenting on recent reports of rampant land clearing and wanton destruction of forests in Kuala Krai and Gua Musang.

An official at the deputy menteri

besar's office said Ahmad would call a press conference to clarify the issue soon.

Fadhli blamed Umno for playing up the land issue, Ladang Rakyat (people's estate project) and the Lembah Sireh waterfront development along Sungai Kelantan.

"Actually there is no issue regarding these cases brought up by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and Umno.

"The state government clarified a long time ago and not once but whenever the issue

had been raised.

"We have called press conferences and gone down to the ground to meet the people. In the case of Ladang Rakyat, we visited Gua Musang together with the Ladang Rakyat Corporation."

Fadhli said the state government had closed the files on these issues as the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission, which had carried out investigations each time any NGO lodged a report, had maintained that there was no case to investigate.

VIEWPOINT

NEW SUNDAY TIMES: To save wildlife from humans, avoid manufacturing conflict situations

Elephants v humans

UNLIKE African elephants, Bornea pygmy elephants don't have to worry about being killed for their ivory. But, unfortunately, they are still targeted for killing, just because they exist. The 14, whose carcasses were found between Dec 29 and Jan 24, and the sole surviving victim, a 3-month-old baby, are thought to have been targeted for extermination because they may have encroached on human-occupied territory. No more carcasses are expected to be found from this incident, but rangers have not ruled out that more of such incidents may occur, if the killings are an act of "pest control".

The killing of this family of elephants is abhorrent because, other than the sheer act of snuffing out a life, the Borneo pygmy elephant is endangered, and it plays an important role in Sabah's environmental and wildlife tourism industry, which brings in billions of ringgit annually. But, considering that the Gunung Rara Forest Reserve, where the carcasses were found, consists of logging, oil palm and industry tree plantations, it would not be surprising if some of the humans there did not see these grand creatures as anything but pests, to be rid of without an ounce of humanity.

When in direct competition with humans (and their crops), the rights of animals to exist are often expunged, whether legally or otherwise.

So, what is to be the fate of the remaining elephants? Some suggestions are to translocate them to other areas. But where to? The reserve is situated between the Maliau Basin and the Danum Valley Conservation Area, which all exist in the Central Sabah Range — "the largest continuous forest habitat for elephants in the state". It hosts about 1,000 of only 1,600 Bornean pygmy elephants that exist in the wild. Unfortunately, the range includes the 100,000ha Forest Management Unit 23 concession area, which is a commercial forest reserve — the Maliau Basin and Danum Valley being two green "islands" completely surrounded by commercial forest activity. And, although in 2008, the Sabah government placed a ban on logging in the area to allow the habitat to recover, parts of the reserve have been cleared and replaced with oil palm plantations, which intensify the probability of human-wildlife conflict. In fact, in the last 40 years, Sabah has lost 40 per cent of its forest cover to plantations and human settlements. The result of this human act of forcibly occupying animal territory is that the animals are now deemed to "encroach" on human land.

If Sabah truly wants to save the elephants, it must realise that the state is big enough for some development and some elephants, but not in the same overlapping spaces.

When in direct competition with humans (and their crops), the rights of animals to exist are often expunged, whether legally or otherwise.

Over-logging a bane of Pas-ruled states

WATER CATCHMENTS: Kedah govt urged to halt logging in the ecologically sensitive Ulu Muda rainforest

PAS leaders governing Kelantan thought they could replicate the success of highlands agriculture in Cameron Highlands by sanctioning farming in the nearby Lojing Forest Reserve for the last two decades.

More than 20,000ha of pristine highland forests (some of them 1,500m above sea level) had been dished out to state companies and businessmen friendly to the state government.

The outcome: minimal agricultural output, but a huge environmental disaster unparalleled in the history of Kelantan.

The timber concessionaires were obviously more interested in ripping off the highland forests and making loads of money by selling the valuable timber.

As a result, the rivers have silted up, the flora and fauna have diminished, the wildlife has disappeared and the Orang Asli were worse off than they were 20 years ago. The forests that they relied on for their livelihood were wiped out.

The environmental cost must be epic, according to one green activist.

A similar environmental calamity is waiting to happen in Kedah, another Pas-ruled state. Here, the lessons of Lojing have gone unheeded because of sheer greed.

Environmentalists are up in arms with the incidences of indiscriminate logging in Kedah's Ulu Muda Forest Reserve, which could threaten the water catchment forest and affect water supply to millions of people in Kedah, Penang and Perlis.

Legal and illegal logging at the 160,000ha Ulu Muda rainforest bordering Thailand could pose a huge threat to the area's rich flora and fauna.

The most devastating impact of unsustainable logging is the disruption of the forest's ecological function as a

The logging has inflicted **untold damage** on the environment. Even padi farmers are worried that logging, if unchecked, **would dry up irrigation canals.**

A Jalil Hamid is NSTP group managing editor



water catchment area, leading to "increased and more severe incidents" of floods and droughts, according to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Malaysia.

On Friday, a group of 16 Malaysian civil society organisations, which have formed a coalition called "Friends of Ulu Muda", urged the Pas government to halt logging in the area.

"The forests contain unique ecosystems that are fragile and irreplaceable.

"Given the importance of the forest reserves as water catchments, we call on the Kedah government to immediately gazette the forest reserves as water catchment forests under the National Forestry Act 1984 as they provide water to the Ahning, Pedu and Muda dams," it said.

The three dams supply drinking water to Kedah (including Langkawi), Penang and Perlis. Almost 100 per cent of Kedah's and 80 per cent of Penang's water supplies come from Ulu Muda.

The Muda irrigation scheme in Kedah, which forms about 40 per cent of the country's total rice production, relies heavily on water from Ulu Muda. So do the wafer fabrication plants and other high-tech industries in Bayan Lepas, Kulim and Prai.

Despite its strategic role as the main water catchment area for the northern states, the Ulu Muda forest has yet to be gazetted as "a protected area". There is also no holistic management plan in place for Ulu Muda to ensure the long-term sustainability of the forest.

A 358ha plot near the Pedu dam, which is being developed into a man-

go plantation, has turned into a scarred, pockmarked landscape, according to the *New Straits Times* reporters who visited the site recently. Swathes of land overlooking the dam have been cleared for the project, causing huge sedimentation of the nearby rivers.

The logging has inflicted untold damage on the environment. Even padi farmers are worried that logging, if unchecked, would dry up irrigation canals.

Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Azizan Abdul Razak has defended logging near the Pedu dam.

"There is nothing wrong with the site," he remarked.

Ahead of the general election, the logging issue is set to raise political temperature in the state.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, who visited Kedah last week to address a mammoth youth rally, has lent his support to the "Save Kedah" anti-logging campaign via his Twitter account.

The campaign, spearheaded by a non-governmental organisation, hopes to rally thousands of youth to gather at the Pedu dam on Saturday to see for themselves the "environmental damage".

Not unlike in Kelantan, income from logging has been a "saviour" for the Kedah government struggling to boost its dwindling state coffers. But, it is also emerging as a bane of Pas.

There were other issues that have angered voters since Pakatan took power in 2008. These include Azizan's decision to stop post offices from collecting payment for water bills since March 2011 and the mushrooming of entertainment spots, especially in Sungai Petani and Alor Star.

There are also a couple of election manifesto promises that remained unfulfilled.

These include monthly allowances for imam and bilal and incentives for women.

But judging by the "unusually high" turnout among youth to hear Najib addressing the "Himpunan Orang Muda Kedah" rally in Alor Star last week (even the Pas people were talking about it), a wind of change could be sweeping the state.

Seeking better jobs and better living standards, the youth themselves could inspire the wind of change. Umno leaders should not let this great opportunity slip away.

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Jobs more vital than budget deficits

UNEMPLOYMENT WOES: Advocates of austerity policies won't admit that their prescription has failed despite mounting evidence

THREE years ago, a terrible thing happened to economic policy, both in the United States and Europe. Although the worst of the financial crisis was over, economies on both sides of the Atlantic remained deeply depressed, with very high unemployment. Yet the Western world's policy elite somehow decided en masse that unemployment was no longer a crucial concern, and that reducing budget deficits should be the overriding priority.

In recent columns, I've argued that worries about the deficit are, in fact, greatly exaggerated — and have documented the increasingly desperate efforts of the deficit scolds to keep fear alive.

Today, however, I'd like to talk about a different but related kind of desperation: the frantic effort to find some example, somewhere, of austerity policies that succeeded. For the advocates of fiscal austerity — the austerians — made promises as well as threats: austerity, they claimed, would both avert crisis and lead to prosperity.

And let nobody accuse the austerians of lacking a sense of romance; in fact, they've spent years looking for Mr Goodpain.

The search began with a passionate fling between the austerians and the Republic of Ireland, which turned to harsh spending cuts soon after its real estate bubble burst, and which for a while was

It's time to put the deficit obsession aside and get back to dealing with the real problem — namely, unacceptably high unemployment.

Paul Krugman



held up as the ultimate exemplar of economic virtue.

Ireland, said Jean-Claude Trichet of the European Central Bank, was the role model for all of Europe's debtor nations. American conservatives went even further. For example, Alan Reynolds, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, declared that Ireland's policies showed the way forward for the US, too.

Trichet's encomium was delivered in March 2010; at the time Ireland's unemployment rate was 13.3 per cent. Since then, every

uptick in the Irish economy has been hailed as proof that the nation is recovering — but as of last month the unemployment rate was 14.6 per cent, only slightly down from the peak it reached early last year.

After Ireland came Britain, where the Tory-led government — to the sound of hosannas from many pundits — turned to austerity in mid-2010, influenced in part by its belief that Irish policies were a smashing success. Unlike Ireland, Britain had no particular need to adopt austerity: like every other advanced country that issues debt in its own currency, it was and still is able to borrow at historically low interest rates. Nonetheless, the government of Prime Minister David Cameron insisted both that a harsh fiscal squeeze was necessary to appease creditors and that it would actually boost the economy by inspiring confidence.

What actually happened was an economic stall. Before the turn to austerity, Britain was recovering more or less in tandem with the United States. Since then, the US economy has continued to grow, although more slowly than we'd like — but Britain's economy has been dead in the water.

At this point, you might have expected austerity advocates to consider the possibility that there was something wrong with their analysis and policy prescriptions. But no. They went looking for new



People going to a job centre in Rosemead, Los Angeles in California in this file photo last year. The US unemployment rate rose to 7.9 per cent in January from 7.8 per cent last December. AFP pic

heroes and found them in the small Baltic nations, Latvia in particular, a nation that looms amazingly large in the austerian imagination.

At one level this is kind of funny: austerity policies have been applied all across Europe, yet the best example of success the austerians can come up with is a nation with fewer inhabitants than, say, Brooklyn. Still, the International Monetary Fund recently issued two new reports on the Latvian economy, and they really help put this story into perspective.

To be fair to the Latvians, they do have something to be proud of. After experiencing a Great-Depression-level slump, their economy has experienced two years of solid growth and falling unemployment. Despite that growth, however, they have only regained part of the lost ground in terms of either output or employment — and the unemployment rate is still 14 per cent. If this is the austerians' idea of an eco-

nomonic miracle, they truly are the children of a lesser god.

Oh, and if we're going to invoke the experience of small nations as evidence about what economic policies work, let's not forget the true economic miracle that is Iceland — a nation that was at ground zero of the financial crisis, but which, thanks to its embrace of unorthodox policies, has almost fully recovered.

So what do we learn from the rather pathetic search for austerity success stories? We learn that the doctrine that has dominated elite economic discourse for the past three years is wrong on all fronts. Not only have we been ruled by fear of non-existent threats, we've been promised rewards that haven't arrived and never will.

It's time to put the deficit obsession aside and get back to dealing with the real problem — namely, unacceptably high unemployment. NYT

Books have a story to tell, even if you don't read them

DEFERENTIAL: They are to be nurtured, kept, loved and later, perhaps, read

THERE'S never a bad book I remember the late British politician Enoch Powell once saying, you always learn something from whatever you pick up. Powell, a Greek scholar, once read the poet Virgil and came up with his notorious "river Tiber foaming with much blood" speech.

"Why don't you write a book?" people often say, at which I would blush because it's more a command than an inquisitive note. Well, I did. At the very last meeting

of the Women's Air Corps India (WACI) some years ago, I met a veteran who asked about it, bought it, and came back to me envigorated. No, not because of what I wrote, but by the idea that if I could, so she should, so she went home and penned a life of her own and I am glad, and saddened too in part, by what she wrote.

Last week a dear friend picked up a book that had passed through many hands and finally passed on to him by his dad. It was *A Grammar of the Malayan Language* by William Marsden, battered and

foxed and in need of cuddles and much love. He sent it to a friend who did splendid restoration work on it, and my friend's Marsden, already two hundred and a bit in our day and age, now looks fit to live through another hundred.

We've been having private conversations elsewhere on the lure of books and it all started by my friend's William Marsden re-appearing in its new garb. It was a book presented to his dear dad, now long departed, at a Rotary night, my friend started. On the inside is inscribed the name Humfrey Ball, the man who gave my friend's dad the book.

"Wasn't he Humfrey Barnaby Ball, the lawyer?" I asked.

My friend took another look and

said yes indeed, the name inscribed therein is H.B. Ball, in beautiful old-fashioned manuscript. So we now have an old book, memory of a friend's dad, and Humfrey Barnaby who I only knew in passing as a lawyer in old Kuala Lumpur. Curiosity and research have produced these facts: that he was born in London's Hampstead, called to the bar in 1948, joined the tank regiment in 1939, demobbed 1946, taught English in Iraq and arrived in Malacca in 1950 (where he joined the Rotary Club).

All that in a book, its contents, history, passage through time, and the aura that it has picked up. All books have a story to tell, even if

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"We have all picked up books here and there and people buy them if only to keep. They are meant to be nurtured, kept, loved and — later, perhaps — read."

Wan A Hulaimi



AGEING

The old are young at heart

I REFER to the editorial, "A full life, well lived" (NST, Feb 5). I would like to share a story about life that I got from a friend.

A man died at the age of 45. He said to God: "Why did you take my life at an early age? I need another 10 years." God asked four questions. "Do you smoke?" The man said "no!" "Do you drink alcohol?" The man said "no!" "Do you gamble?" The man said "no!" "Do you womanise?" The man said "no!"

Then God said: "If you don't do all these things, why do you need to live another 10 years? You are wasting my time."

As the editorial said: "A person has only this one life to live; that life need not be filled with regret looking backwards, nor dread looking forward."

Old age is a figment of the mind. A man does not grow old but ages gracefully if he manages his life properly.

There is a saying that life begins at 40. Many men discover that there is life even after 60.

Playboy founder Hugh Hefner discovered life is worth living at 82 when he married a 26-year-old model.

Old age is about experience and wisdom. It is also the age of wanting to be young again, to make up for lost time. They are children again. Just go to a dangdut club

and we can see the old outnumber the young and are having a gala time. They forget for a moment they have grandchildren at home.

Some climb mountains, some ride Harley Davidson motorcycles, complete with skintight gear and boots. Some prefer to go to the mosque.

Old age is also an age of fear: fear of being left alone to fend for oneself. Children may find the old a nuisance, so they send the old to the old folks' home.

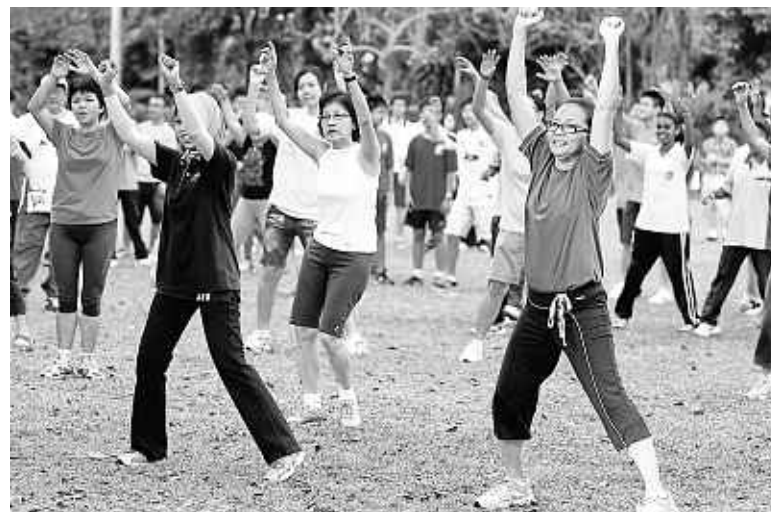
Given the high cost of living, nothing is certain. The old have to prepare for eventualities. They must not put all their eggs in one basket.

Even the rich have to think what will happen to their wealth after they die.

Author Robert Louis Stevenson said: "Youth is the time to go flashing from one end of the world to the other both in mind and body; to try the manners of different nations; to hear the chimes at midnight; to see sunrise in town and country."

Youth never take life seriously for they do not understand the meaning of life. To them, time does not seem to move. They feel they have all the time in the world.

They will never understand the words of wisdom from their parents or from great thinkers like former British prime minister Ben-



The government must come up with volunteer programmes for youth to keep them occupied and make them more responsible.

jamin Disraeli, who said: "Youth is a blunder; manhood a struggle; old age a regret".

Indeed, youth is the age of blunder, recklessness and of being anti-establishment.

It is imperative for the government to make life meaningful for the young and the old.

The government can come up with volunteer programmes for youth to keep them occupied.

This will make them more responsible, more aware and increase their self-esteem.

Most importantly, it occupies their time in a productive manner.

The National Service programme is good and the government should ensure that all youth go through the course to make them understand life better.

Political parties should come up with more social programmes for youth.

In the final analysis, as the editorial said: "The reality of life, youth, old age and whether being 'old' or 'young' is a good or bad thing, is whatever one chooses to make of it."

Hassan Talib,
Gombak, Selangor

HISTORY

Thumbs up for TV3 show on Chinese migrants

I REFER to the segment on Chinese immigration to Malaya or Tanah Melayu on TV3's *Majalah 3* programme recently.

It cited several historians and local Chinese personalities on the topic. All of them dwelt on how tin found in and around Taiping had attracted the early immigrants.

The Great Famine in South China in the early 19th Century might be the main reason for the Chinese to leave their country and come to Tanah Melayu or Malaya and Nusantara Melayu or Southeast Asia. They sailed in junks, which were wind-powered.

Much later, the Chinese women started joining the men, that is when steamships were introduced. It made sailing from South China to Southeast Asia shorter and more bearable.

There are two other reasons the Chinese men fled South China:

their involvement in triads and being hounded by the Manchus, especially those who were strong supporters of the Ching Dynasty ruler, who lost to the Manchus.

Based on my estimation, about 30 per cent of Chinese in Malaysia, if not more, has Chinese ancestry, especially in Malacca.

It is sad that the history of Chinese immigration to Tanah Melayu has not been dwelt with before in the form of novels, feature films or television drama serials, except for *Kinta 1881* that focused on gangsterism and triad activities among the early Chinese immigrants in Tanah Melayu.

So, the programme on TV3 was much welcomed, despite its flaws.

The most interesting aspect about Chinese immigration to Tanah Melayu was the role played by the Malays, who welcomed the Chinese into their community.

This fact has never been acknowledged before.

One could find a tiny Chinese store in the middle of a rural Malay village serving the community, and the Malays supporting it.

Most of the Chinese youths were first registered in Singapore before being taken to the various states in Tanah Melayu. It was only much later when tin was found in Perak that many Chinese youths sought employment there.

Most do not know that the Chinese were actually forbidden by the Chin Dynasty emperor from leaving China. Those who left were considered "traitors" and should they return, they would be arrested and hanged.

The only provision available for the Chinese to leave China then was for them to not return and that they should abide by the laws of the countries they were in as well as

adopt to the local lifestyle and language.

This was what the early Chinese Babas and Nyonyas had done when they embraced Malay culture and lifestyle, without losing their own identity. In fact, they stopped speaking in Chinese, especially Hokkien.

And if one were to look at the experiences in other countries, especially the Philippines, Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, the Chinese immigrants there had adapted themselves well.

And because only men initially fled from China to Indonesia, in particular Java, most of the Javanese in the northern part of the island have Chinese ancestry, with their grandfathers and great-grandfathers being Chinese.

Mansor Puteh, Cheras, Selangor

ENVIRONMENT

Save what's left of Lojing

I AM glad NST front-paged the Lojing Highlands issue in Kelantan ("Stripped Bare" — NST Feb 7).

More than 20 years ago, I traversed Lojing Highlands while working for the Health Department to help Orang Asli combat diseases such as malaria and typhoid. Its streams with crystal-clear water, fresh morning air, cool ambiance of the nights and thick tropical forests were memorable. But when I travelled along the Lojing-Gua Musang road two years ago during my *balik kampung* trip to Pasir Mas, I had an "ecological nightmare".

Determined to save Lojing, a few friends and I formed Yayasan Bina Lestari Malaysia, a non-governmental organisation aimed at promoting sustainability in the development of the highlands.

With little funds but big aspirations, we engaged the authorities in Kelantan on the objectives and long-term vision to manage the natural resources in the state for the sake of future generations. Our efforts have borne some fruit although the effort to recover Lojing is far from over.

We agreed to preserve a 65ha in Lojing as an "ecological park". We recently took several state leaders to visit the Doi Tung royal project in Thailand, where the Royal Mae Fah Luang Foundation has successfully preserved the ecological sanctity of the hills in the north without compromising the economic needs of the local ethnic communities.

Our approach is to create new, more sustainable models of agriculture and economic activities. At the rate development is taking place in Lojing, its fragile tropical highland ecosystem will not last beyond one generation.

The public should be informed of what has gone wrong in Lojing and what can be done to save what remains of this last frontier of highlands paradise in Kelantan, as well as those in peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak.

The highlands are our heritage. We look forward to hosting a public forum on this issue. Readers are welcome to share their ideas on our website www.biomaya.com.my

Wan Izzuddin Sulaiman, director,
Yayasan Bina Lestari Malaysia,
Petaling Jaya, Selangor

PRIME NEWS

'See video of Anwar belittling Pas'

TRUE COLOURS: Pas leaders told not to ignore Anwar's tricks any more

LAVANYA LINGAN
KUALA LUMPUR
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PAS leaders were urged to be more assertive and alert to avoid being manipulated by opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Commenting on Anwar's latest video controversy which showed him belittling Pas leaders, Perak president Datuk Ibrahim Ali said

this time around, Pas leaders should watch the video to see Anwar's true colours.

"Nik Aziz (Pas spiritual leader Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat) and Hadi (Pas president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang) refused to watch Anwar's "china doll" video and took his words for what transpired in it.

"But this video involves Pas leaders' credibility. So, they should not ignore Anwar's tricks any more."

He said he could foresee Anwar defending the video saying that his words were twisted, but the recordings were clear evidence as to what Anwar could do to win votes.

"His words were mere election tactics to attract voters in Sabah and Sarawak.

"Nowadays, all statements are recorded, so it is important for Nik Aziz and Hadi to watch the video to realise Anwar's ploy," he said.

Anwar, in the video clip recorded during a Chinese New Year open house in Sabah recently, stressed that Pakatan Rakyat had not changed its stand on the use of the word "Allah" by non-Muslims.

He also commented that Nik Aziz

no longer understood Islam and described Hadi as a mere follower.

Echoing Ibrahim's sentiments, former Parti Kesejahteraan Insan Tanah Air (Kita) president Zamil Ibrahim said that Nik Aziz and Hadi should be more vigilant about Anwar's political ploys which may affect Pas' principles.

"Nik Aziz and Hadi should not blindly accept Anwar's excuses any more. They should watch the video and judge him based on the clear evidence."

He said all three Pakatan Rakyat parties should hold a joint press conference to clear their stand on the use of the word "Allah" by non-Muslims.

"The (Pas) presidential council first made the decision to allow the use of the word 'Allah' by non-Muslims. But when the Syura Council objected it, the opposition pact failed to give a clear statement on their final stand."

Zamil said the issue had brought friction among the three parties as they are not able to see eye to eye to reach an amicable solution.

"I would not blame Lim Guan Eng or Karpal Singh for not understanding the sensitivity of the issue, but Anwar should know better.

"For someone who gives *khutbah* during Friday prayers, Anwar should be more sensitive toward religious issues."

Large swathes of areas in **Lojing, Gua Musang**, including this hill above an **Orang Asli** settlement, have been **stripped of vegetation** to make way for **large-scale agricultural projects**.



Water cuts in Negri tomorrow

SEREMBAN: Certain areas in Jelebu, Jempol, Rembau and Tampin in Negri Sembilan will experience water supply disruption tomorrow.

Syarikat Air Negeri Sembilan Sdn Bhd corporate chief Azlan Abd Aziz said the 12-hour disruption in Jelebu would begin at 8am, to facilitate repair and maintenance works in Ulu Kemin.

In a statement here yesterday, he said the affected areas were Mukim Ulu Triang, Kuala Klawang, Peradong, Ulu Klawang, Glami Lemi, Taman Naga Mas, Meranti, Titi, Sri Kenaboi and Sri Jelebu, Sekolah Menengah Teknik Kuala Klawang, MRSM Kuala Klawang and Kolej Komuniti Kuala Klawang.

He said the disruption in Jempol would be from 9am to 5pm, due to scheduled cleaning of the Lui Timur tank, adding that it would affect the Lui Timur Felda area.

Supply to Palong 2 to 14 in Jempol would be simultaneously disrupted, due to meter installation works at the Lodah tank in Tampin.

The disruption in Rembau would be from 8am until 8am the following day due to meter installation works at the Rembau-Tampin border.

The affected areas are Kendong, Kota, Gadong, Legung Ulu, Legung Hilir, Bongek, Chengkau, Nerasau, Penajis, Miku, Selemak, Astana Raja, Semerbok, Kampung Durian Daun, Kampung Pulau Besar, Kampung Pulau Bukit, Kampung Pulau Mampat, Kampung Fajar Harapan, Kampung Batang Nyamor, Kampung Chenong Ulu, Kampung Lada, Kampung Tanjung Kerling and Kampung Batu Hampar. **Bernama**

'Not right to convert this to farm land'

KOTA BARU: A non-governmental organisation yesterday alleged that the state government may have changed the status from forest reserve to farm land on the hilly terrain of Gua Musang with little thought as to the impact on the environment.

Kelantan Patron of Professionals (Kelpro) president and lawyer Nor Azli Ahmad said it was irresponsible of the state government to make the land conversion involving massive forested areas even if it had the legal authority to do so.

"Only the state executive council has the power to change the land status. We suspect the provisions in land law have been exploited for the conversions.

"We believe this was all done to fulfil the interests of a few people to make money from state land even at the expense of the environment."

Article 74(2) of the Federal Constitution states that land and natural resources are matters under the jurisdiction of the state governments.

It also states that state governments are empowered to enact laws and policies on forestry independently and a state forestry director is appointed to manage the administration and regulation of forest harvesting; revenue collection which includes premiums, royalties, deposits, cess and other charges, the management and development of forest resources as well as planning and coordination of the development of forest-based industry.

Kelantan had recently come under the spotlight when aerial photographs of large swathes of areas in Lojing, Gua Musang, published in newspapers showed the land was stripped of vegetation to make way for large-scale agricultural projects.

It was also reported that massive logging and land clearing had caused heavy siltation in rivers near the sites. The siltation could have been triggered by soil erosions especially during heavy rain.

Nor Azli said state government leaders might be able to hide behind

land law but their actions were morally unacceptable.

For example, he said, logs could not be indiscriminately felled if they were under forest reserve status as there was a regulation to properly tag them based on criteria, such as their size before timber could be harvested.

"When land is converted to other status, such as agricultural development, any tree can be chopped down from the area as there is no need to comply with forestry rules."

Kelantan deputy forestry director (development division) Mohd Fauzi Abu Bakar said a quota of 5,910ha of forest in Kelantan could be logged legally every year.

He said the areas that could be harvested included those in Gua Musang and other remote areas.

"This quota is set by the National Forestry Council and the department only issues the permits. The actual logging allowed with licence approval is less than the quota."

Fauzi, however, could not provide

the number of logging licences issued last year or how much timber had been logged.

He also denied that illegal logging activities were being carried out in the state, including in the areas recently highlighted by the media.

"There are logging activities being carried out in certain areas in the state but all have permits.

"They are either clearing land for development of new projects or individuals with permits carrying out activities on their own land."

Fauzi said the public should have no doubts on the credibility of the department to enforce its rules as it was capable of handling the matter.

"Our department has been recognised internationally and has been awarded with certification by Malaysian Timber Certification Council for the last 10 years for good forest management."

He said the introduction of a special task force, or "flying squad", also proved to be effective in forest management.

Incursion has robbed Kiram of public sympathy

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Like Indonesia, the Philippines does not accept the idea that there can be a state within a state in the republic, which is why Kiram is no different in terms of his rights and obligations from any other citizen.

In Indonesia, too, there remain many sultans such as the rulers of Cirebon, Yogyakarta and Surakarta in Java. But they, too, have no special powers or rights, and they too come under the law of the republic.

Indonesia has been better able to deal with some of the claims of the former rulers of the country, for the central government has displayed more sensitivity in according them the respect that is their due: in the history books of Indonesia, Indonesian children learn about the role played by the sultans in the anti-colonial struggle for instance.

And today the kingdom of Yogyakarta has been able to reposition itself very well, packaging itself as a tourist destination and presenting itself as the custodian of Javanese art, culture and heritage.

Some of the less fortunate kingdoms in Sumatra and Kalimantan, however, have fallen into a state of despair and ruin.

The fate of the sultanate of Sulu seems to be similar to that of some of the now-defunct royal houses of Indonesia.

Bereft of funds and with no real political authority, it relies on cultural capital and its claims to history to project itself.

But Kiram's armed incursion into Malaysia was probably one of his "biggest miscalculations", to quote the Philippine analyst Joseph Franco; and has now turned into a major own goal that has robbed him and his followers of whatever residual sympathy others may have had for his cause.

The royal families of Indonesia have also tried to project themselves internationally, but through their promotion of the arts, by appealing to Unesco, and by maintaining their relevance as a bastion of culture and history — and certainly not by waging war against the Indonesian republic, which would be politically self-defeating.

However this crisis pans out in the near future is anyone's guess at the moment, though one thing is clear for now: Asean, for all its strengths and weaknesses, is a still a region where no country accepts the notion of states within states, and that is not likely to change tomorrow.



Where once verdant forests carpeted the terrain, Lojing is but a sad scene of environmental meltdown, brought about by extensive logging and large-scale farming projects.

BN to save Kelantan forests

PRESERVING NATURE:

Pas govt's tacit nod for companies to run operations with scant monitoring has turned nature on its head

IT is reassuring to hear the voice of reason rising above the din of political binge on race, religion and name-calling of late.

Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed, who heads Barisan Nasional (BN) in Kelantan, breaks up the one-upmanship routine to speak on rectifying the sorry state of the environment in the state.

This is an area which state government leaders have unenviably shown ample apathy in terms of preserving the nature.

Mercy for nature, it appears, is not the language that they are fond of using in their administration.

Years of deforestation activities, done in the name of development and revenues, have left a misshapen landscape in the interior of Kelantan. Gua Musang, particular-

ly Lojing Highland, bears the brunt of poorly enforced state policy and insensitive businessmen towards the environment.

Where once verdant forests carpeted the terrain, Lojing is but a sad scene of environmental meltdown, brought about by extensive logging and large-scale farming projects.

In this instance, Kelantan Pas leaders cannot pretend that they are not blameless for the destruction.

In a way, it is their tacit nod for the profit-driven companies to run operations with scant monitoring that has turned nature on its head.

Mustapa may have a tough task ahead to find a recourse for the mistake when BN is returned to power in the next general election in Kelantan. He has recently promised to protect Lojing and other forest reserves in the interior of Kelantan against further damage.

His is the first from among political leaders in Kelantan to zero in on the issue of the environment with a firm commitment to rectify the rot. The eventual implemen-

tation will certainly save the remaining old jungles and hills from being levelled indiscriminately.

Adding weight to his statement, he later announced that the pledge will be incorporated into the state BN's election manifesto.

"We will put a stop to massive land clearing in Lojing as we need to protect the environment," he said recently.

This is one of his six pledges, which include stopping the award of land to DAP leaders, who have won the right under the current state government to clear about 4,000ha of forest for plantation in Gua Musang.

Aerial pictures published by newspapers recently of the alleged site do not reflect any concern for environmental impact on the surroundings. Subsequent reports of environmental degradation such as river pollution and soil erosion have not been dealt with convincingly by the state government.

It is fairly reasonable for the public to have the impression that the state government has been com-

PLICIT in turning Gua Musang's vast forest into scorched earth.

What Mustapa is trying to do is to reverse the destructive trend and give justice to nature and the people dependent on its resources.

His future move will also address the growing concerns of the people, especially the Orang Asli, who have been adversely affected by pollution in their surroundings.

Nothing but support from the public is the acceptable reaction to such an ideal as it would be thoughtless to take the opposite stand.

The final state BN manifesto is yet to be unveiled but early pledges from BN, including seven projects outlined by the prime minister for Kelantan, drive home the point that the state should not be left to suffer under the present administration.

More importantly, the pledges are based on the commitment that they will be fulfilled. From the outset, the initial promises seem to be welded together to address the shortcomings in various spheres that directly touch the lives of the people.

Left to the devices of the current administration, however, the old hills in Gua Musang may not be able to have another day in the sun.



ON THE FRONTLINE with Nik Imran Abdullah NST Kelantan bureau chief

China's economy is not 'too big to fail'

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Indeed, such guarantees constitute the most significant medium and long-term financial risks to China. In recent months, there has been a surge in LGIV bond issuance, aimed at supporting local governments' efforts to stabilise economic growth through stimulus-style investment projects. But the implicit guarantees on these bonds — as well as on existing bank loans — amount

to hidden extra-budgetary liabilities for the central government. Local governments have also accumulated massive amounts of non-explicit debt through arrears, credits and guarantees.

Once this debt's cumulative risk exceeds a local government's financial capacity, the central government is forced to assume responsibility for servicing it, endangering its own financial capacity.

At the same time, China's corpo-

rate sector relies excessively on debt financing, rather than equity. China's non-financial corporate debt accounts for roughly 62 per cent of total debt — 30 to 40 per cent higher than in other countries.

According to GK Dragonomics, China's total corporate debt amounted to 108 per cent of GDP in 2011, and reached a 15-year high of 122 per cent of GDP last year. Many of these heavily indebted enterprises are state-owned, and have bor-

rowed from state-controlled banks.

The implicit guarantees on this debt, too, suggest that the government's liabilities are much higher than its balance sheet indicates.

China is not too big to fail. In a fragile economic environment, policymakers cannot afford to allow the size of China's balance sheet to distract them from the underlying structural risks and contingent liabilities that threaten its financial stability. **Project Syndicate**

PRIME NEWS

490 Orang Asli from 13 settlements get BR1M aid

SEPAANG: About 490 members of the Orang Asli community from 13 settlements here received 1Malaysia People's Aid (BR1M 2.0) yesterday.

Sepang Member of Parliament Datuk Seri Mohd Zin Mohamed said the Barisan Nasional (BN) government was deeply concerned about their welfare and wanted them to have the quality of life that others enjoy.

He said BN had always been grateful for the strong support of the Orang Asli.

"As the coordinator of Selangor BN, I believe the support in Sepang for the party is strong and am optimistic that the community will continue to work closely with their leaders in bringing development.

"The BN government has never marginalised the indigenous people," he said after presenting the aid at the Kolam Air Orang Asli settlement in Bangkong, Dengkil, here yesterday.

Also present were Dengkil Assemblyman Datuk Marsum Paing and the Bangkong Tok Batin (Orang Asli Leader), Ongin Chinak.

Meanwhile, Ongin said through BR1M, the government proved that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak was transparent and committed to helping people, including the Orang Asli.

"The community has always supported the leadership of the prime minister and the BN government as it believes this is the only way it could secure a future," he said.

A village elder, Angkat Repa, 63, a recipient of the BR1M money, said the aid would ease the burden of daily life.

"I am grateful for this assistance... Since my husband's death a few years ago, I have not had a regular income.

In **Kuala Pilah**, Deputy Rural and Regional Development Minister Datuk Hasan Malek said the Orang Asli's continued support for BN had enabled the government to repay their trust and faith through various programmes for the community.

"The government has converted 469 higher education and 13 overseas study loans to children of Orang Asli to scholarships, which means they do not have to pay anything back to the government," he said at the *Juk Bersamaq Sen Oi Beq* programme held at the Orang Asli village in Kampung Langkap, Kuala Pilah, here, yesterday.

As of Jan 25, he said 52,415 Orang Asli had applied for the 1Malaysia People's Aid (BR1M 2.0) and government had approved 66 per cent, or 34,700, of the applications, which amounted to RM14.8 million.

Stripping of Lojing forest 'a danger to humans'

DANGER: Uncontrolled development in highlands causes river pollution and erosion

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UNCONTROLLED agricultural activities in Lojing, Gua Musang, which has resulted in river pollution, will affect other areas or districts located along the Kelantan Delta if left unchecked, said a research team from Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK).

Senior lecturer Zulhazman Hamzah, who headed the team that has been conducting research in the area since 2008, said besides uncontrolled agricultural activities, it has also detected erosion and landslides, including at hilltops, that might pose a risk to motorists travelling along the Gua Musang-

Cameron Highlands road.

"We believe that the activities might expand to other new areas surrounding Lojing. Besides river pollution, it would also pose a danger to humans," he told a briefing here yesterday.

Zulhazman said the activities that caused the Ber river, the main river in Lojing, to be seriously polluted might also disturb the area that has been gazetted for Rafflesia rehabilitation.

"The state government had agreed to gazette 550ha of land in Lojing for a study on the flower, but we are afraid that if the activities are not stopped immediately, our efforts to take care of the species will be hampered," he said, adding that the biggest specie of Rafflesia in the world was discovered in the area.

Also present at the briefing were UMK Jeli campus director Prof Dr Ibrahim Che Omar

and Kelantan People's Action Council president Azmi Ali.

Brahim said the group was worried that the rampant conversion of the forest land to agriculture land might result in continuous river pollution and serious erosion if they were not properly managed.

He said the other reason for the activities was a lack of coordination between government agencies, resulting in improper forest rehabilitation, besides operators not following the agricultural standard.

Azmi called on the authorities to look into the matter seriously for the sake of the Kelantan people.

"I am shocked to see what is happening in the Lojing area. The place is the heart of Kelantan as it is the source of the Kelantan river.

"The damage that has been done there cannot be repaired," he said.



"We believe that the activities might expand to other new areas surrounding Lojing."

Zulhazman Hamzah

UMK senior lecturer



UiTM Vice-Chancellor **Datuk Seri Prof Dr Sahol Hamid Abu Bakar** (right) exchanging documents with Brahim's Holdings group executive chairman **Datuk Ibrahim Ahmad Badawi** yesterday. At centre is Higher Education Minister **Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin**.

Khaled: Strengthen varsity-industry ties

SHAH ALAM: Universities should have a close rapport with industries to ensure high quality graduates, said Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin.

He added that such a collaboration could bring about benefits in many areas, such as improving the skills of graduates and making certain the industry has a pool of well-trained graduates to be absorbed by these companies in future.

"The ministry welcomes such partnerships. An undergraduate can gain experience from the exposure to such attachment, which can help increase his or her marketability upon

graduation," he said after witnessing the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) and Brahim's Holdings Berhad yesterday.

He urged other universities to follow suit and close the gap between students and the working world.

He also said that industries could use such collaboration to inform universities whether their students had adequate knowledge and the skills to succeed.

"Employers constantly complain about low quality graduates. Therefore, this is a chance

for them to take pro-active measures to rectify the problem.

"Knowledge is no longer obtained only from universities. Students need to have a connection with the outside world," he said, adding that it was a win-win situation for both students and employers.

Earlier, UiTM Vice-Chancellor Datuk Seri Prof Dr Sahol Hamid Abu Bakar and Brahim's Holdings group executive chairman Datuk Ibrahim Ahmad Badawi signed the three-year deal, which is renewable, and 1,000 UiTM students are expected to be trained during the period.

HKK 2013
National Craft Day

Kompleks Kraf Kuala Lumpur
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