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Questions over big ape sanctuary

KUCHING: Mystery surrounds a proposed new orang utan sanctuary in Kuala Lumpur, which nobody seems to want.

Sarawak and Sabah are not willing to relocate their orang utan to the sanctuary, said Deputy Tourism Minister Datuk Dr James Dawos Mamit.

He said both states wanted their orang utan to stay where they were and therefore, the government now had to look for orang utans from a small island in Perak.

He said the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) had allocated about 200 acres in Kepong to set up the new eco-tourism attraction which was similar to the Semenggoh Wildlife

Centre here and the Sepilok orangutan sanctuary in Sandakan.

"We are going to transfer some of the orang utan from the island in Perak since the population there has increased and exceeded the island's caring capacity which makes it difficult for the primates to get enough food," he said after opening SK Siburan Baru Parent-Teacher Association's annual general meeting here yesterday.

Dawos, who is a FRIM board member, said the species in Perak, the Borneo orangutan (*Pongo pygmaeus*), was similar to that in Sarawak and Sabah. He was not certain when the project would start.

However, he said the government

would not go back on its plan because an orang utan sanctuary in Kuala Lumpur would be a big success and it would leave a lasting impression on visitors in line with the government's intention to make eco-tourism a more prominent sector.

"I cannot ascertain when we can make it a reality. But we must do it," he said.

FRIM director-general Datuk Dr Abd Latif Mohmod, however, said the institute had never requested for the setting up of an orang utan sanctuary.

"Orang utan conservation comes under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and Perhilitan. We are a forest research centre focusing on flora," he said.