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‘Keruing paya’ now extinct

PRICE OF DEVELOPMENT: Last natural habitat in Bikam forest reserve in Perak cleared for oil palm cultivation

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WITH its last natural habitat totally wiped out, the *Dipterocarpus coriaceus* tree species, known locally as *keruing paya*, is now regarded as extinct in the peninsula.

A finding made by the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) on Wednesday found that trees from the species could not be found at their last remaining bastion — the now de-gazetted Bikam permanent forest reserve near here.

The state government had this year fully de-gazetted what remained of more than 400ha of the forest reserve to make way for the cultivation of oil palm.

A team of FRIM officers, led by forest botany expert Dr Lilian Chua, visited the former forest reserve for a site inspection for the species following a report that was published on July 22 in the *New Straits Times*.

In that report, Sahabat Alam +Malaysia’s field officer Meor Razak had expressed his fear that the *keruing paya* trees were facing threat of extinction following logging and land clearing activities in the area.

The NST reported that 175ha of the forest had been cleared by a timber contractor for an oil palm plantation, while another 175ha was being cleared by a different timber contractor for the same purpose.

The remaining area of the excised forest, believed to be more than 100ha, is expected to be cleared by another timber contractor after October.

Malaysian Nature Society’s president Professor Dr Maketab Mohamed said he was informed of the team’s finding by FRIM director-general Datuk Dr Abd Latif Mohmod.

“It is indeed a shocking find but this phenomenon did not happen overnight.

“The extinction was caused by the act of the state which de-gazetted forest reserves for oil palm plantations over a long period of time.

“The *keruing paya* is a species that is exclusive to the southern Perak region.

“It is a highly valued species for timber. The Bikam forest reserve was identified as the last largest

natural habitat for the trees.

“But even that habitat is now gone; becoming a victim of exploitation of the forest for oil palm cultivation.”

He said internationally, the *keruing paya* was ranked as a “critically endangered” species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN).

However, with the last *keruing paya* forest already cleared in Bikam, he pointed out that the same species could be ranked in Peninsular Malaysia as “extinct in the wild” category of IUCN.

When asked if there was a likelihood of obtaining saplings of the species, Dr Maketab said saplings were available at FRIM.

“But these saplings should be planted in their original habitat and not where they don’t belong.

“MNS is prepared to undertake planting of the saplings at the same site, that is, the Bikam area.

“We will undertake the exercise provided the state government can provide land to grow the species,” he said, adding that MNS would work with FRIM in the replanting exercise.



What is left of the *keruing paya*’s natural habitat after the de-gazetted Bikam permanent forest reserve near Bidor was cleared by a timber contractor for an oil palm plantation. Pic by Rosman Shamsudin