

Headline	Set up body for endangered flora		
MediaTitle	New Sunday Times		
Date	04 Aug 2013	Color	Full Color
Section	Local News	Circulation	156,910
Page No	31	Readership	295,000
Language	English	ArticleSize	271 cm <sup>2</sup>
Journalist	THARANYA ARUMUGAM	AdValue	RM 8,841
Frequency	Weekly	PR Value	RM 26,524



# 'Set up body for endangered flora'

**CAUSE FOR CONCERN:** Malaysian Nature Society alarmed at number of plant species on verge of extinction

**THARANYA ARUMUGAM**

**T**HE Malaysian Nature Society has called for the setting up of a national coalition to conserve endangered plant species and their habitats.

"We need a professional coordinating body, whereby if there is a possibility of species becoming extinct in an area, proposed development on the land should be halted until the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) conducts studies on the species.

"If development is deemed unavoidable, the endangered plant should be transferred to another location similar to its natural habitat," said MNS president Professor Dr Maketab Mohamed.

He suggested the National Resources and Environment Ministry (NRE) set up a secretariat or council overseeing all flora and fauna species facing extinction.

While he lauded FRIM's suggestion for an act to protect threatened plant species, he said this would take time to be formulated.

"The government should initiate the creation of the Endangered Flora and Fauna Council first and the law can be promulgated at the same time," he told the *New Sunday Times*.

He said the council's role would be to ensure a complete inventory of all endangered species, carry out studies and research, and acquire land for conserving the species.

He said state governments should also be more committed to

protecting endangered plant species, especially plants that grow on land earmarked for development.

"Human-induced activities are the primary reason behind the worrying number of threatened species in the country," he added.

The *New Straits Times* had on Saturday reported that 230 plant species were at risk of extinction, according to a study undertaken by FRIM to examine the state of flora in the peninsula.

Of the 975 plant species randomly selected for FRIM's red list conservation status assessment, 42.2 per cent (411) were deemed threatened with extinction.

The study revealed that 23.6 per cent of species were on the verge on extinction, while 15.2 per cent are vulnerable and three per cent were rare species found in Malaysia.

Many more plants were classified as near threatened (182 species, 18.7 per cent).

"Species' habitats are rapidly disappearing because of agriculture activities, unplanned development, and other human activities.

"The State governments should play an active role in conserving the habitat of these endangered species."

He said the main stumbling block to the endangered tree species' conservation was the state governments' reluctance and

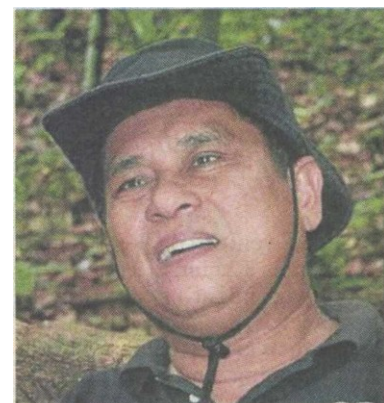
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Citing the example of the keruing paya tree in Perak, he said the state should have made a collaborative decision on de-gazetting Bikam forest with the NRE, the Forestry Department, FRIM, and the Wildlife Department (Perhilitan).

"But, instead, the state made use of the Federal Constitution, which gives it absolute power over land, forests and water matters and ignored collaboration with departments."

"Perhaps the government should look into amending this provision in the constitution."

He also pointed out that besides climate change, extinction might occur naturally without human interference.



**Professor Dr Maketab Mohamed** says plant species are declining because of development