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# 'Do not wipe out Gunung Kanthan'

Environmentalists urge firm to mine underground instead of quarrying at the surface

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**IPOH:** Environmentalists are urging Lafarge Malaysia Berhad to mine for limestone underground instead of extending its quarrying activities to the remaining untouched parts of the 400-million-year-old Gunung Kanthan.

Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) president Prof Dr Maketab Mohamad said the company, which is a subsidiary of construction materials manufacturing giant Lafarge Group, should invest in technology to do underground mining in Ipoh.

"Around 90% of our limestone resources are underground. Lafarge has the technology, so it does not have to wipe out the remaining surface area," he said, adding that other companies were already carrying out underground mining for limestone in Perak and other states.

Dr Maketab said MNS had written to Lafarge International on July 18, urging it not to quarry zones C and D of Gunung Kanthan, which has a huge amount of biodiversity and is home to the endemic trapdoor spider *Liphistius Kanthan* and rare Serow goat *Capricornus Sumatraensis*.

Both species are fully protected under the Wildlife Conservation Act.

*Liphistius Kanthan*, found only in Gua Kanthan, is rated as being critically endangered in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List which is a system for assessing the level of threat to the continued survival of the various plant and animal species.

"We are not asking to kick them out or put a halt to the limestone industry. They are already using the north side, which are zones A, B and E, and they should continue with underground mining there," he said, adding that it would be meeting Lafarge representatives on Monday.

Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) plant taxonomist Dr Ruth Kiew said existing quarrying activities on the northern side might have caused the extinction of the *Paraboea Vulpina*, a critically endangered plant from the African Violet family.

"We collected it in 1990 when MNS did a survey. Now, we can't find it," she said, adding that there

were another seven plant species there which were also listed as endangered on the IUCN Red List.

Lafarge Kanthan plant manager Sekar Kaliannan had said earlier that initial studies of zone C indicated that it "does not contain sensitive biodiversity".

Sekar had added that the company's focus was on managing zone D appropriately.

Kiew said it was critical for areas C and D to be conserved as a unit due to the interactive nature of the ecosystem there.

She said there was also a limestone forest and swamp in zone C, which was home to the Serow goat.

"If they take zone C, the Serow will not be able to live on Gunung Kanthan, and it will also mean the end of Gunung Kanthan," she said.

Representatives from cave temples located at Gunung Kanthan are also against the proposal to quarry zones C and D as the temples would be destroyed by blasting activities.

There are three Taoist and two Hindu temples, as well as one Buddhist monastery located at zones C and D.



**Off limits:** A signage erected by Lafarge Malayan Cement at Gunung Kanthan in Ipoh.