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PLANT CONSERVATION

Set up ecological planning units, too

THE Convention on Biological Diversity in 2002 stressed that the threat faced by plant species is serious and requires worldwide attention.

Based on the latest Malaysian Plant Red Lists, which was published by the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM), there are about 230 plant species in Malaysia that are on the verge of extinction. Most of them are found in specific niches.

FRIM has indicated that four species, namely *Oreogrammitis crispatula*, *Oreogrammitis kunstii*, *Begonia eiromischa* and *Shorea kuantanensis* are extinct.

There are 97 plant species categorised as critically endangered, 133 endangered, 148 vulnerable and 29 rare.

Among the critically endangered plant species is *Dipterocarpus coriaceus*, or locally known as *keriung paya*. They are found in the swamps of Perak and Sarawak.

Other critically endangered species are *Vatica flavida* (resok padi), which is found in freshwater swamps in Perak, *Parashorea globosa* (meranti pasir daun besar), *Dipterocarpus sarawakensis* (keruing layang), *Diperocarpus semivestitus* (keriung padi), *Hopea subalata* (merawan kancing) and *Hopea bilitonensis*, which are found in Sarawak.

In addition to FRIM, there are several local universities and state forestry departments that are active in various aspects of plant conservation.

For example, a team from Universiti Sains Malaysia is studying the *araceae* group (kumpulan keladi), specially focusing on the endemic genus, *cryptocoryne*. Most of our native *cryptocoryne* populations thrive well in rivers.

However, these aquatic plants are gradually disappearing. These species are not only used as aquarium plants but are also good ecological indicators for a river system.

Based on the global strategy for plant conservation from 2011 to 2020 under the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity, which is spearheaded by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and Plants for the Planet (BGCI), the Malaysian authorities should play an active role in safeguarding our plant species from extinction.

I recommend that all sensitive ecological sites be gazetted as ecological sensitive zones.

These endangered plants should be considered as an important natural heritage.

State governments should be aware of the existence of their own natural heritage, rather than carrying out developments without consideration for high bio-diversity sites and ecologically-sensitive zones.

Besides economic planning units, perhaps each state should also establish an ecological planning unit.

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Plants from the *araceae* group can not only be used as aquarium plants but are also good ecological indicators for a river system.