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# Conserve rest of Gunung Kanthan

Quarrying activities must not extend into southern sector, says MNS president

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**PETALING JAYA:** The Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) is lobbying for the entire southern portion of Gunung Kanthan in Ipoh to be conserved as a unit, said president Prof Dr Maketab Mohamad.

Following the discovery of new flora and fauna species there, he said it was clear that Lafarge Malaysia Berhad should not extend its limestone quarrying activities into Zones C and D.

"The whole area must be preserved. Lafarge may divide the areas for administrative purposes but they are interconnected ecosystem-wise," he said when contacted.

Dr Maketab said that MNS had no issue with Lafarge's Kanthan cement plant nor its existing quarrying activities.

"But it must source limestone from other locations once the resources are finished, which will not be for many years. Zones C and D cannot be touched," he added.

Dr Maketab said MNS would propose to Lafarge that it could help run Zones C and D as a conservation area and visitors centre, so people could

go in and understand the karst system in the Kinta Valley.

Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) plant taxonomist

Dr Ruth Kiew, whose team discovered two new flora species on Zone C, described the area as containing "extremely sensitive biodiversity".

"It is critical to conserve the entire ecosystem intact, in particular the unique limestone forest that is a refuge for plants and animals because Gunung Kanthan is already an island surrounded by inhospitable farms and plantations," she said.

They found a herb with purple flowers (*Gymnostachyum sp. nov.*) of the Acanthaceae family and a tree (*Vatica sp. nov.*) of the Dipterocarpaceae family in one of several plant surveys there last year.

A new species of gecko, named the Gua Kanthan bent-toed gecko (*Cyrtodactylus guakanthanensis*), was discovered in Zone D by American herpetologist Dr Lee Grismer and his team in July last year.

This discovery marks the second endemic fauna species found in the

area, with the first being the *Liphistius Kanthan* trapdoor spider.

When contacted, the Malaysian Karst Society urged Lafarge to allow visitors and scientists into the caves so they could experience the beauty of limestone caves for themselves.

"We used to organise trips into the caves but have been restricted recently as the property is now private," said a spokesman who declined to be named.

Lafarge is expected to announce the results of its biodiversity study of the area by March.

The study was done by a team from Universiti Malaya's Institute of Biological Sciences together with Lafarge's International Biodiversity Panel.

**Gunung Kanthan is already an island surrounded by inhospitable farms and plantations.**  
- DR RUTH KIEW