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Minister: No highway splitting FRIM

Tropical forest should be conserved as it's a national treasure, says Palanivel

By ISABELLE LAI

PETALING JAYA: The Natural Resources and Environment Ministry doesn't want an elevated highway built across the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia.

Minister Datuk Seri G. Palanivel told *The Star* that FRIM, the largest and oldest man-made tropical forest in the world, should be conserved and safeguarded as it was a national treasure.

"It has been decided that at this point in time, there is no need for a highway, especially one that involves FRIM land," he said.

Palanivel's announcement came after *The Star* reported last week that FRIM was being threatened by a proposal to "split in half" its grounds for the elevated highway.

Palanivel noted that last year alone, FRIM had carried out 181 projects, worth RM29mil, as well as maintained its reputation for research excellence.

Palanivel added that FRIM had also raked in RM100mil from the 500,000 visitors it received last year, while two books it published last

year had won the Premier Award (Research) and Best General Book under the Book Industry Award (Science category).

"Now, FRIM is working to achieve Unesco World Heritage status by 2017," he added.

FRIM director-general Datuk Dr Abd Latif Mohmod said that with the ministry's decision, he believed the issue was over.

"We were very touched by the media, NGOs and public support for our cause," he said.

Once a degraded area with abandoned mining pools and barren vegetable farms, FRIM has been globally lauded as a model of successful reforestation and was recognised as a natural heritage in 2009.

It was also declared a national heritage in 2011.

Founded in 1929, the facilities there include a 106-year-old herbarium housing over 200,000 specimens and a xylarium with over 10,000 wood samples from over 1,500 species.