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'Preserve all of Gunung Kanthan'

MNS: Hill's ecosystem must be kept whole

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IPOH: Environmentalists are demanding that Gunung Kanthan's ecosystem be kept whole and that any conservation there not be limited to merely one of the two zones.

Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) president Prof Dr Maketab Mohamad said Kanthan's Area C and D were connected.

"(The areas are marked by a) human boundary. It's an ecosystem. You can't quarry one side without affecting the other," he said.

He said Kanthan's southern ecosystem would be in trouble if only one area was designated a conservation zone.

Dr Maketab said he would be meeting with Lafarge Malaysia — which wants to quarry one of the zones — in mid-June to present his views to the company.

Lafarge is the parent of a group of companies dealing in the manufacture and sale of cement, ready-mixed concrete and other related building materials.

Initial findings by the company's biodiversity study on the two areas determined that Area D was environmentally sensitive while Area C was not.

But Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) plant taxonomist Dr Ruth Kiew warned that Area D would be severely affected if Area C was quarried.

"There is a water system that runs through the limestone forest into the caves. If they get a flood in the cave, it will be damaged," she said.

The Star previously reported that Dr Kiew and her team had discovered two new flora species in Area C.

The area was also home to nine plant species that were on Malaysia's Red List of Endangered Plants.

However, Universiti Malaya Institute of

You can't quarry one side without affecting the other.

— PROF DR MAKETAB MOHAMAD

Biological Sciences head Prof Dr Rosli Hashim does not consider Area C environmentally sensitive.

"The list of species (in Area C) is not as impressive as that in Area D.

"The only species of importance there is the serow (mountain goat)," he said, and the animal roamed and was not localised to that area.

Dr Rosli and his team of 13 researchers had carried out Lafarge's six-month biodiversity study of the area.

Jim Ruxton, Lafarge senior vice-president of industrial operations, said it had updated the Perak state executive council on the study's findings.

The study has also been presented to the International Lafarge Biodiversity Panel, which was reviewing it.

Ruxton said the state exco was looking to form a committee on the matter and that Lafarge would work with both to reach a decision on Area D.

The final report on the biodiversity study is expected to be released next month.

Ruxton said Lafarge would carry out an environmental impact assessment of the area if it was required to.

Lafarge plans to spend more than RM200mil over the next two years to expand its Kanthan plant facilities and operations.

The entire area spans some 150ha, with half already quarried by the company.