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Groups worry over quarry

Lafarge's encroachment into eco-sensitive areas causes alarm

By **PATRICK LEE**

patrick.lee@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: Quarrying at Perak's Gunung Kanthan by cement giant Lafarge Malaysia has alarmed green groups; who say work has encroached close to "sensitive" areas.

According to a source, a small hill within the limestone mountain's southern area was cut down in January.

He expressed concern that rocks from "Area B" where the hill was located would be strewn along the adjacent "Area C", causing fears that quarrying there would follow.

Gunung Kanthan, which is home to many endangered species of flora and fauna, is divided into several sections with "Area C" and "Area D" located in the south.

Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) president Henry Goh, who confirmed that quarrying had been conducted on the hill, cautioned that the removal of forestry there would

have damaging effects on Area C and Area D.

The Star previously reported the discovery of two new flora species in Area C, which is also home to nine species that are on Malaysia's Red List of Endangered Plants.

Goh said Lafarge Malaysia had assured him that both Area C and Area D would not be affected.

He also claimed that temples embedded in or around the mountain had received evacuation notices.

Goh said a biodiversity report by Universiti Malaya, commissioned by Lafarge Malaysia, had not been revealed.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has highlighted its concerns to Lafarge chairman Bruno Lafont in France.

"We are concerned to learn that a road is being blasted immediately adjacent to Area C," IUCN Species Survival Commission chairman

Simon Stuart wrote in a Feb 13 letter.

He stated that Google Earth images showed the forested valley next to Area C "is being filled with rubble".

It was learnt that Lafarge Malaysia had yet to meet the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) which wanted to preserve Areas C and D.

Speaking to *The Star*, Lafarge Malaysia vice-president Mariano Garcia maintained that Area C and Area D were out of the mining plans.

He said the biodiversity report on Gunung Kanthan was completed before Christmas.

Garcia said he did not know of the said evacuation notices, but said monks and temple staff had entered the quarry site and verbally abused his workers.

He also said Lafarge Malaysia had been trying to meet FRIM to no avail.

"It has been very difficult ... (FRIM) refuses to work with us," he added.