

Headline	Working to conserve heritage		
MediaTitle	The Star		
Date	07 Mar 2015	Color	Full Color
Section	Letters	Circulation	288,916
Page No	64	Readership	866,748
Language	English	ArticleSize	284 cm <sup>2</sup>
Journalist	N/A	AdValue	RM 14,348
Frequency	Daily	PR Value	RM 43,043



# Working to conserve heritage

**I**REFER to the report "Lafarge's encroachment into eco-sensitive areas causes alarm" (*The Star*, March 5) and would like to make some clarifications.

The Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) botany team started the botanical survey on Gunung Kanthan in mid-2013. Our interest from the beginning was to document the richness of the plant diversity of this limestone hill.

The findings of the survey was to form the basis for the sound management of the remaining intact parts of Gunung Kanthan.

We have, from the beginning, been very transparent and open with all stakeholders, including Lafarge Malaysia. We have given to Lafarge our findings and publications.

The allegation that FRIM refuses to work with Lafarge is totally untrue. The following were some of our interactions with Lafarge:

1) Upon completion of the FRIM plant biodiversity survey, on June 12, 2014, the detailed results were presented at a meeting with the former vice-president of (Industrial Operation) of Lafarge, consultant of the biodiversity survey, Malaysian Nature Society, WWF and other stakeholders.

Our findings indicated a rich flora containing many species of conservation importance, including possibly some new species.

At that meeting, FRIM invited Lafarge staff and the consultant to visit the herbarium at FRIM if they would like to look into the verification of the findings. However, no one has taken up this offer. Our staff subsequently sent another invitation on Aug 8, 2014. Again this was not taken up.

2) On Sept 5, 2014, the former vice-president requested a courtesy visit with FRIM director-general. This was cancelled at the last minute by Lafarge.

3) Immediately after the FRIM scientific results appeared in international peer-reviewed journals (Sept 2, 2014 and Jan 6), copies were given to Lafarge and the consultant.

4) Requests to Lafarge, both verbal (June 12, 2014) and written, for a copy of the botanical section of its Biodiversity Report were not answered even though the consultant said it contains unpublished FRIM data.

5) No scientific results from the Lafarge Biodiversity Survey have been released. The presentation

given by the consultant (June 12, 2014) was totally lacking in any scientific/biodiversity data.

Only on Feb 17 did Lafarge request by e-mail for another appointment to see the director-general of FRIM. However, due to the director-general's tight schedule, he was unable to accommodate the request.

As you can see, we have not been difficult or unwilling to work with Lafarge.

Collaboration is a two-way process and Lafarge must also be sincere in its intentions.

We are still very keen to see the protection and conservation of Area C and D of Gunung Kanthan.

We are indeed very happy to take note of Lafarge vice-president Mariano Garcia's statement that Area C and Area D are out in the mining plans.

FRIM remains open to the possibility of working with Lafarge in conserving such an important Malaysian natural heritage of the intact remnants of Gunung Kanthan.

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