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FRIM to upgrade signs soon

WE refer to the letter "Signs at FRIM need maintenance" (*The Star*, May 25) by Ahmad Faizuddin of Gombak, and thank him for his observations while going on a guided walk in the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM).

There were four issues he raised in the letter: The need for better maintenance of signposts; the lack of a map of the FRIM grounds and few direction signboards at different locations; difficulty finding a toilet; and rubbish on the ground.

We are in the midst of upgrading the signs in the campus. The design was finalised late last year and construction is expected to be completed before the end of the year.

The picture of a yellow sign nailed to a tree that was published along with the letter is not a FRIM sign. It was the work of vandals who cleared a path to a restricted area. We will remove that sign immediately.

With regard to signs or signposts in the forest or along the nature trails in FRIM, there are few because FRIM does not encourage visitors to explore the forest on their own.

All visitors interested in exploring the forests are advised to go to the FRIM One-Stop Centre (Block D6) where there are staff ready to provide information and guidance, depending on the activities the visitors would like to do.

All visitors with smartphones going for the Canopy Walkway are encouraged to snap a picture of the FRIM map for directions to the walkway. This practice reduces the use of paper and also cuts

down on the amount of rubbish (discarded maps).

Those without smartphones will be given a copy of the map.

Groups comprising more than 10 people must engage a nature guide to bring them to the Canopy Walkway. It is necessary to engage a guide if you want to explore the forest.

There are seven locations where we have public toilets. We have also upgraded the toilets at the base of the Rover Trail (near Masjid Jamek), the Sg Kroh picnic area and at the Kepong Botanic Garden.

Apart from the toilets behind the museum, we also have toilets opposite the One Stop Centre,

200m away. We shall put up a map showing these toilet locations at the One Stop Centre and a few other strategic places.

On the issue of rubbish, this is a perennial problem for us. FRIM has conducted various campaigns through its annual World Environment Day and International Day of Forests programmes as well as "No Plastic, No Styrofoam" campaign. We have improved on the garbage collection system to reduce the problem but the campus area is just too large for us to monitor what our visitors do when no one is watching. However, this problem of the lack of civic consciousness is not only observed in FRIM.

We see this everywhere.

In our experience, it is often not the children but adults who are most likely to throw rubbish in the forest. We have found pieces of paper dropped along our trails as well as in off-limit areas by some groups of runners.

The mentality that garbage is the problem for the garbage collectors is prevalent in this country and it needs more than FRIM's efforts to bring about changes.

Apart from this, FRIM has been having a challenging time in

recent years with the increasing number of visitors. We are seeing more incidents of vandalism. Our signposts have been damaged; our "No Entry" signs are not

only ignored but also destroyed; our Canopy Walkway hut and bridge have been vandalised as well as our various rest huts; and we also have people creating new forest trails!

Most were done by adults who, when caught red-handed, would argue, defend and even challenge our staff to a fight.

This, along with our growing concern for the safety of joggers given the recent erratic stormy weather, the need to check on the health of trees in some parts of our forest and to allow for recovery, has resulted in the proposal made public (via FRIM website and public notices within the campus) earlier this year to close the Rover Trail starting in June.

We know many of our regular joggers would object. Some of them have been coming here for years and they feel a sense of belonging. So we are inviting them for a dialogue on June 17 to explain this proposal and to share with them the various challenges we face, as well as to inform them of the condition of the Rover Trail, the problem with vandalism, the need for closure to let the forest area recover from erosion and soil compaction, and to listen and talk about their concerns so that we can work together to ensure the conservation of the FRIM forest.

Finally, we would like to clarify that FRIM is not a public park. It is first and foremost a research institute which is open to the public for recreational activities.

**DATUK DR ABD LATIF
MOHMUD**
Director General of FRIM

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