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Bringing young closer to nature at FRIM

I REFER to the letter "FRIM to upgrade signs soon" (*The Star*, May 28) by the director-general of the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM), Datuk Dr Abd Latif Mohmod. The issues of signposts maintenance and lack of ground maps, difficulty finding a toilet, and rubbish strewn on the ground were well explained.

Even though FRIM is not a public park, opening the institute to the public can raise awareness, especially to children, about the importance of the environment and biodiversity conservation.

Prior to my visit, I never knew there was a little national park in the vicinity of Kuala Lumpur where nature lovers could experience the coolness and serenity of a natural tropical rainforest.

So, since we were not aware of the facilities, most of us didn't

wear proper outdoor attire that day. But we still learned a lot about the value and biodiversity of the forest reservation.

Our guide was very informative and easy going. At one point, though, I felt that most of the guides were "old troopers". What has happened to our youngsters?

Are they not interested to learn about nature?

Furthermore, most of the visitors too were older people who seemed to love being in the forest.

I believe the younger generation should be exposed more to nature.

Today, children are so busy with their electronic gadgets they seem to not really care about the environment and of preserving it.

Bringing them back to nature would give them a better understanding of the environment than what they would learn from class-

rooms. At FRIM, for example, we saw a pond near the entrance that had four dragon fish. A huge fish with black and yellow scales emerged from the water when the guide clapped his hands. He said it was a South American tropical freshwater fish known as *Arapaima Gigas*.

Arapaima is one of the largest freshwater fish in the world and is found in the Amazon River.

We came up close to the raintree (*Samanea Saman*). In Malay, it is known as *pokok hujan-hujan* or *pokok pukul lima* because its pinkish white flowers are arranged like

rain drops and the petals fold up at 5pm.

The tree originated from South America and was brought to the Malay peninsula in 1876. Since the 1900s, raintrees have been planted in urban areas especially along

roadsides and highways.

Walking deeper into the forest, we were introduced to many kinds of trees, like the *Macaranga* which enjoys a symbiotic relationship with ants. Its leaf is usually used to wrap *nasi dagang*.

Can students learn such information in school? Perhaps, yes. But the value is different when children experience it directly in the forest. It will bring them closer to nature.

Children are the future generations who will inherit this earth. Hence, we should make them aware of the value of the green environment at early age, and we truly appreciate the efforts of FRIM to keep the park open to the public.

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