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Transform ex-mining land to preserve endangered species, says expert

KUALA LUMPUR: In a move to preserve endangered flora and fauna, it is imperative that former mining areas in the country be transformed into green areas, said an environment and ecology expert.

Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) ecophysiology branch head Dr Ang Lai Hoe said there were about 70,000ha of ex-mining land in peninsular Malaysia, which could be transformed.

Land transformation is the reclamation, rehabilitation and restoration of barren land into productive land through scientific and technical improvements, he told *Bernama* in an interview here recently.

"Today, large areas of our forest are inevitably lost due to massive

development and conversion into housing, industrial and agricultural purposes. Consequently, some of our floral and faunal biodiversity of the forest may be extinct," he said.

Citing an example in 2011, Ang said the FRIM had successfully established a model of man-made forest on a former landfill and flood mitigation site under a consultative project with the Drainage and Irrigation Department (DID) at Ara Damansara Eco-Park (APEP).

"This was the first project in Malaysia where we grew rainforest on a landfill site and flood mitigation area," he noted.

He said APEP currently housed more than 90 species of tropical rainforest tree species respectively, including endangered and en-

demically species.

However, Ang said ex-mining land should not be transformed into food production sites as they contained heavy metals such as mercury, lead, arsenic and lead, and also radioactive substances.

"This degraded land should be converted into forests and also later can be used for parks and housing estate development after ensuring that the radiation level is not harmful to health.

"The time needed to transform barren land into a green area depends on the objective of growing the trees," he added.

Elaborating on the cost needed to undergo the full transformation, Ang said it depended on how fast the land ought to be transformed to achieve the objectives. — *Bernama*