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'Protect Bukit Kiara park'

GREEN LUNG:
Gazette it before
it is lost to
development,
govt urged

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At a time when green lungs in urban areas are being threatened by rapid development, the Bukit Kiara park is sadly no exception.

Major stakeholders in one of the few green lungs here have cried foul over the delay in gazetting the 189ha park as a forest reserve.

Concerned citizens, who call themselves Friends of Bukit Kiara (FoBK), have been let down multiple times on the matter.

Its president Tan Sri Dr Salleh Mohd Nor said in the 1990s, the government had plans to turn the area into the first botanical garden in Malaysia, much like London's Hyde Park.

"When I was the director of Forest Research Institute Malaysia, the government spent more than RM4 million for consultation and planning efforts but, unfortunately, the plans did not come to fruition.

"Instead, the area saw the establishment of a golf club," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Salleh said in 2007, the cabinet gave its approval to turn the park into a Large Scale Public Park (TABB).

"Land prices have been increasing



Mountain bike riders exploring the trails in Bukit Kiara park recently. Pic by Saddam Yusoff

and people are greedy when it comes to owning land. They prefer to see high-rise buildings instead of trees."

The problem, Salleh said, was because the area had not been gazetted.

He said the National Landscape Department (NLD) had taken steps to care for the park but this did not mean that it would be safe from development.

"Within nine years after the park was turned into a TABB, NLD built canopies, improved the joggers' trail and drainage system.

"Without the park being gazetted, it belongs to the state and people can still apply to get parcels of land. I heard recently that there are more development plans in the Kiara Valley (the northern part of the area).

"This should not be allowed because the land was privately owned but acquired by the government for public, not commercial, use."

Salleh said if the land was developed, the city would lose more of its green lung.

"This can cause many wild animals to stray into people's homes.

"These are the dangers that we cannot see immediately."

Trails Association Of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor (Traks), a group instrumental in opening up the jungle trails, is another major stakeholder.

Its president Julian Gomez said they had observed several massive land clearing exercises in the vicinity over the past few years.

In October 2013, Traks members saw land clearing taking place for a

bungalow project.

"We were told that the people involved were compounded. However, the massive land mass has been, until today, left as it is.

"If you walk to the hill top, you can see between 50 and 100 big trees blatantly cut without any supervision," he said.

"Traks members have seen heavy machinery clearing the original trail and rubber trees," he said.

Gomez said the way the project works were carried out had raised concern.

"The soil sampling works may affect the pristine rivers running through the trails.

"When the machinery came in, we saw a lot of soil washed down the streams. We saw this last December and in December 2014," he said.