

# Project threat to water security

**T**HE recent water supply issue in the Klang Valley has caught the attention of many. While the focus is on the water treatment capacity and demand, another issue which is in need of urgent attention is the protection of water catchment forests to safeguard our water supply and ensuring that this function is not compromised in any way.

There is a looming threat to water resources in the Klang Valley, posed by the proposed construction of the Kuala Lumpur Outer Ring Road (KLORR) project which would cut through the Ampang Forest Reserve (FR) and compromise its crucial ecosystem function as a water catchment area for the Klang Valley.

The Ampang FR, gazetted both as a water catchment forest in 1999 and as part of the Selangor State Park in 2007, is threatened by the potential construction of the first phase of the KLORR.

If the project is to proceed, the KLORR would traverse through this water catchment forest, upstream of the Ampang water treatment plant causing tracts of forests to be cleared to make way for the highway.

Forest clearing will increase surface run-off and therefore increase sedimentation of rivers resulting in higher sediment loads in the Ampang water treatment plant.

This in turn will negatively affect the operations of the Ampang water treatment plant.

The Ampang water treatment

plant was shut down in March this year due to damage after heavy rain, and if forests are cleared to make way for the highway, the effects can only worsen.

The Ampang FR is also part of the Selangor State Park, classified as a Rank 1 Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) under the National Physical Plan and accorded the highest status of protection.

ESAs provide vital ecosystem services to people and act as important biodiversity reserves. The forests in the Selangor State Park are also within the Central Forest Spine (CFS) which forms the backbone of the ESA network in Peninsular Malaysia.

Under the 10th Malaysia Plan, the government has committed to implementing the CFS Masterplan with the objective to re-establish, maintain and enhance forest contiguity within Peninsular Malaysia.

A highway across the Selangor State Park will increase forest fragmentation and therefore will be contradicting the CFS Masterplan.

The need for the KLORR is based on a report prepared more than 15 years ago, an era where private car ownership was promoted.

However, the present government is intensifying efforts to improve and promote the use of public transportation. Datuk Seri Idris Jala, the chief executive officer of

the government's Performance Management and Delivery Unit (Pemandu) and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, in his article titled "An Efficient MRT System is Vital to Make KL a Great City" (published in The Star, July 16) pointed out that Malaysia has the second-highest car ownership after the United States, due to the lack of an efficient public transportation system.

He stressed that the government is taking a holistic approach to make the public transportation system more efficient and attractive, and urged the public to use public transportation.

According to his article, the government is already making tremendous achievements in encouraging the public to use public transport.

Given that the government's effort is already showing impressive results within such a short period, the use of public transportation can only improve, given more time, especially with the implementation of the MRT and LRT extension projects.

The crucial question is — why do we need to build more highways in the Klang Valley and encourage the use of private cars, especially if it entails threatening our biodiversity reserves and water security?

Water security is vital for the well-being of the rakyat and the country's economy.

Water resources should be fully protected to ensure water quality and quantity is not compromised. However, are we serious about protecting our water resources if even forests accorded the highest protection status are not spared from man-made threats?

Should we be setting a trend where forests that are accorded the highest protection status are compromised in the name of development?

The answer should be "no"; but the ultimate decision lies in the hands of the Federal and Selangor State governments.

We urge both governments to review the need for the KLORR in the wake of new efforts to improve the public transportation system.

If there is a need for the project, we strongly call on both the Federal and State governments to realign the KLORR and avoid the Ampang Forest Reserve and the Selangor State Park.

We need to avoid having the highway cut through forested areas. The risk of damaging our water resources is far higher than the potential benefits of smoother traffic flow that the KLORR is supposed to provide.

We can survive traffic jams and find ways to avoid them, but we cannot survive without clean and sufficient water!

**Datuk Dr Dionysius S.K. Sharma**, executive director/chief executive officer, World Wide Fund for Nature Malaysia

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