

Perak govt to continue pushing for forest replanting project

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IPOH: The Perak government will continue to push for the 400ha forest replanting project despite the land-clearing issue that has come under the spotlight over the past few days.

According to a source, the state has already approved a permit for the replanting efforts at forest reserves in Kledang Saiong near Batu Gajah, Bukit Kinta in Gopeng and Piah near Gerik.

The project to replant the trees at these forest reserves, deemed as "hutan miskin" (unproductive for-

ests) where illegal logging had taken place, would see more mature trees being chopped down.

State Forestry Department director Datuk Mohamed Zin Yusop said the replanting exercise plan is on.

"Macam itu sahaja" (Just like normal)," he replied in a message but declined to elaborate further.

He also said they were unaware of any discussions between the Malaysian Timber Industry Board (MTIB) and a company.

It was learned that MTIB would be working with a Perak-based company to replant the forest.

Environment Committee chairman Dr Abdul Aziz Bari also said he

had no information on the project.

"I only got to know about it from the media. It was never discussed with the state executive council members," he said.

But according to Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM), the project would affect the eco-system of the area.

SAM field officer Meor Razak Meor Abdul Rahman said the project could affect the water catchment areas and also the habitat for fauna.

"Such a project will also affect water-catchment areas.

"There is a possibility that unknown or rare species of herbs could be destroyed," he said.

"Instead of the replanting project, the Forestry Department could have conducted enrichment or restoration programmes," he added.

The project came to light when a letter purportedly stating that the state government had approved the permit last November went viral.

It also courted controversy as the private company assigned to undertake the replanting exercise was set up just months after the 14th General Election.

Perak Menteri Besar Ahmad Faizal Azumu allegedly said that the company had been screened by the Forestry Department.

He had also said the company

would be working with MITB on the 400ha of land identified as secondary forest.

The state is already in a mire over a 10ha land plot at Bukit Kledang here that was found to have been illegally cleared for a purported oil palm estate.

A probe is still being conducted by the landowner Mentri Besar Inc, with concerned folk calling out for the responsible parties to be named.

Over the weekend, Ahmad Faizal said in Chemor that a new policy on managing its forests would be made known soon to protect the forest.

He said the policy could be announced this week.