



KERATAN SURAT KHABAR

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Decision on forest reserve **hailed**

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PETALING JAYA: The Selangor government's decision to significantly scale down the degazettement of the Kuala Langat North Forest Reserve has eased most of the anxiety of environmentalists.

Pertahankan Hutan Simpan Kuala Langat Utara (PHSKLU) spokesman Suresh Kumar described it as a "victory for the people", while Eco-tourism and Conservation Society Malaysia president Andrew J. Sebastian said it showed that the government had listened.

Nonetheless, both agreed that areas of concern remained, particularly the alignment of the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) project close to the fringes of the forest reserve.

Suresh said the PHSKLU, a coalition set up to campaign for the

Describing it as victory for the people, environmentalists say govt has listened

preservation of the forest reserve, regarded the change of heart by the Selangor government as good news.

"Of course the decision still has to be gazetted and we expect it to happen in December, taking into account that the degazettement was only made on Aug 12," he told *theSun*.

An earlier decision by the state government to degazette all of the 536.6ha forest reserve for mixed development drew public ire and protests.

However, Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Amirudin Shari announced on Wednesday that only 42ha of forest reserve would be degazetted.

He said the land would be allocated to residents of Kampung Orang Asli Busut Baru, who were forced to relocate to make way for the construction of the KL International Airport in 1994, and a smaller parcel of the land would be reserved for the realignment of the ECRL.

He also gave an assurance that his administration would put a stop to plans for development beyond the stated areas.

Sebastian, who expressed euphoria over the latest move by the Selangor government, said the state had made the right move.

"We are also humbled by the public support, particularly those

who rallied behind the cause to protect the forest reserve," he added.

However, Suresh and Sebastian said the state government will have to be clear about the decision to hold a parcel of the land for the ECRL.

Suresh pointed out that the federal government had already decided to align the rail to Serendah, a distance of 50km away from Hulu Langat, so there is no reason for such a provision.

"We will continue to monitor the situation," he said.

He said if the realignment does not materialise, the rail would run on the fringes of the forest reserve.

Sebastian said that rather than allow the ECRL to pass by the forest reserve, the land could be better used for agriculture purposes by the local community.

"We hope it will be officially stated and gazetted for the sake of the Orang

Asli's right to new opportunities without being harassed," he said.

Legal expert Datuk Kamaruddin Ahmad told *theSun* that if the ECRL project proceeds as originally planned and passes even the fringes of the forest reserve, the federal government will have to produce an environmental impact assessment report.

"If this is not done, the community can apply for a court order to declare it null and void," he said.

"Failure to do so is an offence under the Environmental Quality Act 1974."

He cited the example of the Kedah government's decision to allow logging in a forest reserve 15 years ago.

"The stakeholders, including villagers, filed a court order to stop the activities and were compensated," he added.

