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Plant trees, stop deforestation

THE Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) welcomes the government's 100 Million Tree-Planting Campaign 2021-2025 as a move to green the country. However, the government has to ensure that the task is not given to any private companies to handle.

The campaign should empower the people to get involved in the planting under the supervision of the Forestry Department. In this way much money can be saved besides achieving the campaign's objectives. Also, involving the rakyat in this campaign will teach them to learn to appreciate and take ownership of trees in the community.

Greening the country with the tree-planting effort alone is insufficient if deforestation is allowed to continue unabated. The campaign will be seen as mere whitewash for Malaysia, which has earned the "distinction" of "having the highest rate of forest loss" among 10 countries worldwide that are reducing their forest cover.

A study by the University of Maryland in the United States found that some 230 million hectares of Malaysian forest was lost between 2000 and 2012. Deforestation reduces biodiversity, increases greenhouse gas emissions, disrupts water cycles, and increases soil erosion.

The tree-planting campaign should adopt a two-prong



Greening Malaysia: Penang Island City Council landscape department staff and members from various NGOs planting bakau minyak in Kuala Sungai Pinang, Balik Pulau, last December. — Filepic/The Star

approach: increase tree-planting of the right species in the right locations while simultaneously clamping down on deforestation – otherwise, the campaign will be futile.

To address the root cause of deforestation, the Federal Government must make the respective states accountable for any deforestation activity – legal or illegal – that takes place. It would be defeating the objectives of tree-planting if the states are allowed to degazette forest reserves or allow trees to be felled with little monitoring.

Currently under the National Forestry Act, any product from a permanent forest estate or other state land is considered the property of the state but the products may

only be extracted with a proper licence. Thus, extraction falls under the state's jurisdiction. And one way for the Federal Government to control deforestation under a state's purview is to place conditions on federal aid to the respective states.

Laws pertaining to forestry and the environment must be tightened. It must be ensured that there are checks and balances to prevent any abuse of power because governments – federal or state – are merely the custodians of the land's assets.

MOHIDEEN ABDUL KADER
President
Consumers' Association
of Penang (CAP)