



KERATAN AKHBAR

AKHBAR	:	STARLIFESTYLE
TARIKH	:	20/10/2019
JABATAN	:	MUKA SURAT : 3
PERHILITAN	:	JPSM
KLASIFIKASI	:	PERHATIAN

The right to a clean and healthy environment

HEY Malaysia, the haze may be clearing but as you take a deep breath in relief, think again, for this is only a momentary relief.

The first three quarters of 2019 have seen the country's natural environment endure numerous assaults ranging from the pollution of Sungai Kim Kim and persistent plastics pollution to the recent haze. This is on top of the continually ongoing assault on our wildlife, forests and ecosystems.

The theme for this year's National Day was "Love our Malaysia, A Clean Malaysia". The Malaysia I love is not only blessed with cultural diversity but also biological diversity, and I dare say that the latter has helped to shape our culture and identity.

It seems, however, our natural realm may soon have nothing more to give as she continues to be at war with polluters, poachers, and plunderers. If we truly loved Malaysia, would this be the case?

How concerned and aware are Malaysians of the state of our environment? Yes, it is easy to point a finger and say the government is not doing enough or that businesses need to think beyond profits, but as citizens of Malaysia do we really care?

How many of us think we care but conveniently justify inaction because of a lack of access to information, a lack of inclusiveness in decision-making, a lack of access to justice in environmental issues? If we truly care, should we not



Photo: AZHAR MAHFOF/The Star

call for environmental democracy, for a right to a clean and healthy environment?

In conjunction with the recent national and Malaysia day celebrations, perhaps it is timely to cast a new light over the Rukun Negara and see their relevance in our aspiration to achieve sustainable development with its corollary of living harmoniously with nature.

The very first principle, a belief in God, and the fifth principle, on morality, should certainly provide guidance in inculcating and cultivating environmental cognisance

Your Say

lifestyle@thestar.com.my

and consciousness. The other three principles, loyalty to king and country, the supremacy of the Constitution, and the rule of law

undoubtedly support the notion that our natural environment is part of national sovereignty and, hence, the letter of the law ought to be complied with and enforced. And yet, we continue to hear of the illegal taking of wildlife on land and at sea, of illegal dumping of pollutants in our rivers. Perhaps we need more. More access to information, more access to environmental justice, and more

opportunities for public participation. Perhaps we need a stronger Constitutional provision on environmental rights.

The then Honourable Chief Justice of Malaysia, Tun Arifin Zakaria, stated in 2017 that the right to a clean and healthy environment should ideally be added to the liberties that Malaysians are expressly guaranteed by the Federal Constitution. He added that a healthy and ecologically sound environment would preserve the integrity of ecosystems and ecological functions for present and future generations.

form of environmental rights in their national Constitutions or in their national laws.

On Sept 26, our Prime Minister addressed global leaders at a Sustainable Development Goals side event at the United Nations General Assembly and while he addressed issues on poverty and development, a key environment message can be discerned, namely that a clean environment is important to ensure our quality of life.

We need to see the recognition of the importance of a clean and healthy environment and its relationship to our quality of life be translated into an explicit right in the Federal Constitution. This is the best time to do it, as this year, at least four major pieces of national legislation related to the environment are being reviewed, namely the Environmental Quality Act, the Wildlife Conservation Act, the Forestry Act and the Fisheries Act.

Can Malaysians take a collective stand and seize the opportunity to call for the inclusion of elements that underpin environmental democracy such as transparency, access to information and meaningful public participation?

Will Malaysians finally, unannouncedly, call for the right to a clean and healthy environment to become a fundamental right?

For the love of a clean Malaysia, I truly hope so.

G. SHANTINI
Petaling Jaya