



## KERATAN AKHBAR

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# This is why preserving our forests is so important

I REFER to the letter "Merbau good choice as national tree" (*The Star*, Sept 4, online at bit.ly/star\_merbau). The selection of merbau as the national tree and the ongoing *Hutan Kita* exhibition at the KL Tower couldn't have come at a better time.

As major parts of this nation continue to be choked by the haze of smoke from neighbouring Indonesia, we could do with a timely reminder about the importance of protecting our jungles and their rich biodiversity. Nothing is more effective than the haze in driving home the point of what happens if we do not take care of our jungles and let them burn – literally. From life-giving oxygen-pro-

ducers, large tracts of green lungs turn into haze machines, disrupting lives, harming public health and hurting the economy.

While most of the smoke seems to be coming from hotspots in Indonesia, I believe that had we preserved more forested areas and retained more green lungs in Malaysian city centres, the effects of the haze could have been mitigated. Sadly, the "KL Garden City of Lights" project which took off to much fanfare years ago seems to have been abandoned.

Be that as it may, I am glad that the Water, Land and Natural Resources Ministry organised the *Hutan Kita Journey Through Our Rainforests* exhibition. The exhibi-

tion, which is open to the public with free admission, showcases the rich biodiversity of our jungles. It ends on Sept 22.

I visited the exhibition with fellow nature enthusiasts recently. We were struck by how well-structured and informative it is. Visitors have the chance to learn about the different types of forests Malaysia has, such as the mangrove jungles of the Kilim Geoforest Park in Langkawi and the 130-million-year-old rainforests in Taman Negara. There's even a section that illustrates the fireflies colonies from Kuala Selangor. (During our visit, we bumped into Malaysian astrophysicist Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor who brought his children

to the exhibition.)

As for the ongoing haze, it's a matter of time before clear blue skies return. And when they do, we tend to forget about the importance of forest preservation – until the haze returns next year.

Thus is why a solid grounding in the reasons for forest preservation is important. When we collectively stand firm on safeguarding the environment, we can cascade this to lawmakers and policymakers, who would then have to step up diplomatic efforts to consign the annual haze occurrences to the annals of history.

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