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Residents against further development of Taman Botani

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Kota Damansara residents are against further development of Taman Botani, a forest reserve in their neighbourhood, following the rockslide at the New Klang Valley Expressway last Wednesday.

The catastrophe occurred at the edge of the forest reserve bordering the NKVE highway (see graphic).

"While the cause of the rockfall has not been accurately identified, lack of proper planning and the current over-zealous development encroaching into the gazetted forest land of Taman Botani should not be overlooked as one of the factors," said Malaysian Nature Society president Datuk Dr Salleh Mohd Nor said.

Formerly part of the the Sungai Buloh forest reserve (1,618 ha), Taman Botani has received widespread attention last year following campaigns by residents to have it gazetted as a community park.

"We don't want to wait and see what else will happen if the State Government takes away this last remaining green lung in the area. We just hope the rockfall would be a wake-up call to them," said Francis Tan of the Taman Tun Dr Ismail Residents' Association.

According to Salleh, sources close to the Selangor State Development Corporation had provided them with details of how the forest would eventually be developed into pockets of housing areas.

"This cannot be allowed to proceed. Just look at the recent landslide and rockfall at the NKVE highway and you can imagine the kind of environmental impact the area would suffer," Salleh said.

Salleh, who has been appointed the de facto spokesperson and leader of a coalition of eight surrounding areas' residents associations, said they were prepared to raise funds to conserve and maintain the forest.

"This is one of the oldest forest reserves in the country, being home to more than 120 species of birds and various other flora and fauna. It is an ideal green lung and recreation site for all. Please leave it alone."

The coalition, together with the Malaysian Nature Society, had written to both the former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad as well as Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mohd Khir Toyo to request for the preservation of the forest. However, no replies had been received so far.