

## Preserve Greater Ulu Muda Forest and protect it from logging, says coalition

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PETALING JAYA: A coalition of organisations and individuals working to protect the 160,000ha Greater Ulu Muda Forest has expressed concern over an announcement by Menteri Besar Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor (*pic*) that they need to allow logging to avoid legal claims amounting to RM1.5bil.

The Friends of Ulu Muda (FOUM) raised the alarm following the new PAS-led Kedah government's announcement that they need to allow logging to avoid legal implications.

"The true value of the Greater Ulu Muda Forest is much greater than RM1.5bil in terms of its socio-economic value as well as its role in preserving the identity and heritage of Kedah and the surrounding regions," they said in a statement.

They said that PBA Holdings Bhd issued a statement affirming the importance of the Muda, Pedu and Ahning dams in supplying water to 4.2 million people apart from supporting economic activities in Penang, Perlis and Kedah, drawing RM150.5bil in annual revenue.

They said this in response to Sanusi's recent media announcement that the Kedah government would continue logging to avoid legal claims from 40 logging companies amounting to RM1.5bil.

FOUM urged the Kedah government to prioritise the conservation and protection of the Ulu Muda forest and develop other sustainable sources of revenue.

"Our members are ready to offer support in terms of technical expertise and advice on the development of a sustainable and environment-friendly plan to protect the Greater Ulu Muda Forest and help support the post-Covid 19 recovery in the region," they said.

FOUM pointed out that the forest was irreplaceable as it played a pivotal role in supporting the livelihood and well-being of the people of Perlis, Penang and Kedah.

It added that the forests held the key to the prosperity of the northern region of the peninsula, as it was the source of water supply to households as well as agriculture, industry, tourism sectors.

FOUM also said that water sourced from the Greater Ulu Muda Forest also enabled double cropping in the paddy fields of Kedah and Perlis, which contributed up to 50 per cent of the nation's rice production.

It said that the nation depends on Kedah for food security, as the Covid-19 pandemic had disrupted rice imports, adding that the destruction of the Ulu Muda forest would jeopardise paddy production and the livelihoods of 48,500 farmers.

FOUM then added that the Greater Ulu Muda Forest was also home to many threatened wildlife species such as the Asian elephant, Malayan sun bear, Malayan tapir, Malayan pangolin, agile gibbon, hairy-nosed otter, clouded leopard, sambar deer, and well over 320 species of birds.

It said that two sites in Malaysia harbour all the 10 species of hornbills, and one of them is the Greater Ulu Muda Forest.

FOUM acknowledged the difficulty in balancing the need to generate revenue for the state and protecting the forest.

"FOUM believes that sustainable financing mechanisms such as Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES), coupled with heightened commitment and accountability are appropriate steps forward," they said.

It added that ecosystem-based services would enable the Kedah government to generate sustainable revenue in the long run.

FOUM said Kedah could source funds from international agencies, the Federal Government, and other parties to support conservation initiatives.

It also said that they hoped the Kedah government would protect the Greater Ulu Muda Forest for the sake of rakyat, state and the environment.