

LIFE &
TIMES



PULSE

SATURDAY, MARCH 5, 2016

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BROUGHT TO YOU
BY LIFE & TIMES**GROOVE** cover story

BANG! Someone has rear-ended your car on the highway. It spins out of control. In the chaos, other vehicles ram into your car. You pass out.

When you wake up, you're on a hospital bed and the doctor says you're lucky to be alive. But you're in excruciating pain. Your backbone is broken in parts and there are many tears to your spinal cord and damaged nerves. Your rehabilitation will be painful and prolonged. It will be a long time before you walk normally.

This spinal cord injury is the analogy that Puan Sri To' Puan Datuk Shariffa Sabrina Syed Akil (better known as Sabrina) uses to explain the damage to rainforests on the Titiwangsa Range or, as the locals call it, "Banjaran Titiwangsa".

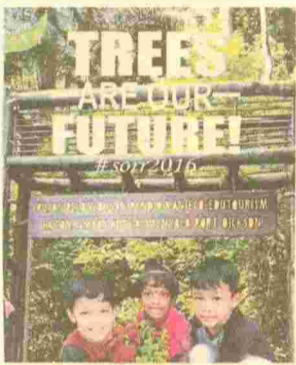
As president of Peka Malaysia (Pertubuhan Pelindung Khazanah Alam Malaysia), she is organising the Save Our Rainforest Race on March 26 to increase awareness on the importance of our tropical rainforest. This year, participants will plant 4,000 forest trees at the Sungai Menyala Forest Reserve in Port Dickson, Negri Sembilan.

In the course of organising this event for four years running, Sabrina sees no let-up in uncontrolled logging on the peninsula. She likens such activities in places like Sungai Galas in Kelantan, Ulu Tembeling, Sungai Goh and Lentang in Pahang to injuries being made to the backbone of our peninsula, the Titiwangsa Range. She is, therefore, not surprised that in the last few years, Malaysia has suffered

from some forms of "paralysis" such as prolonged haze, the devastating floods in the East Coast, the problems caused by bauxite mining and the mudslides in Cameron Highlands.

Without mincing her words, Sabrina says: "I don't agree with what they (the unscrupulous people) are doing. This land doesn't belong to them. It belongs to us, Malaysians, the people."

She does not spare the public either, but concedes that they may be ignorant of the true scale of the destruction of our rainforests. That does not diminish what she sees as a lack of effort by everyone to prevent

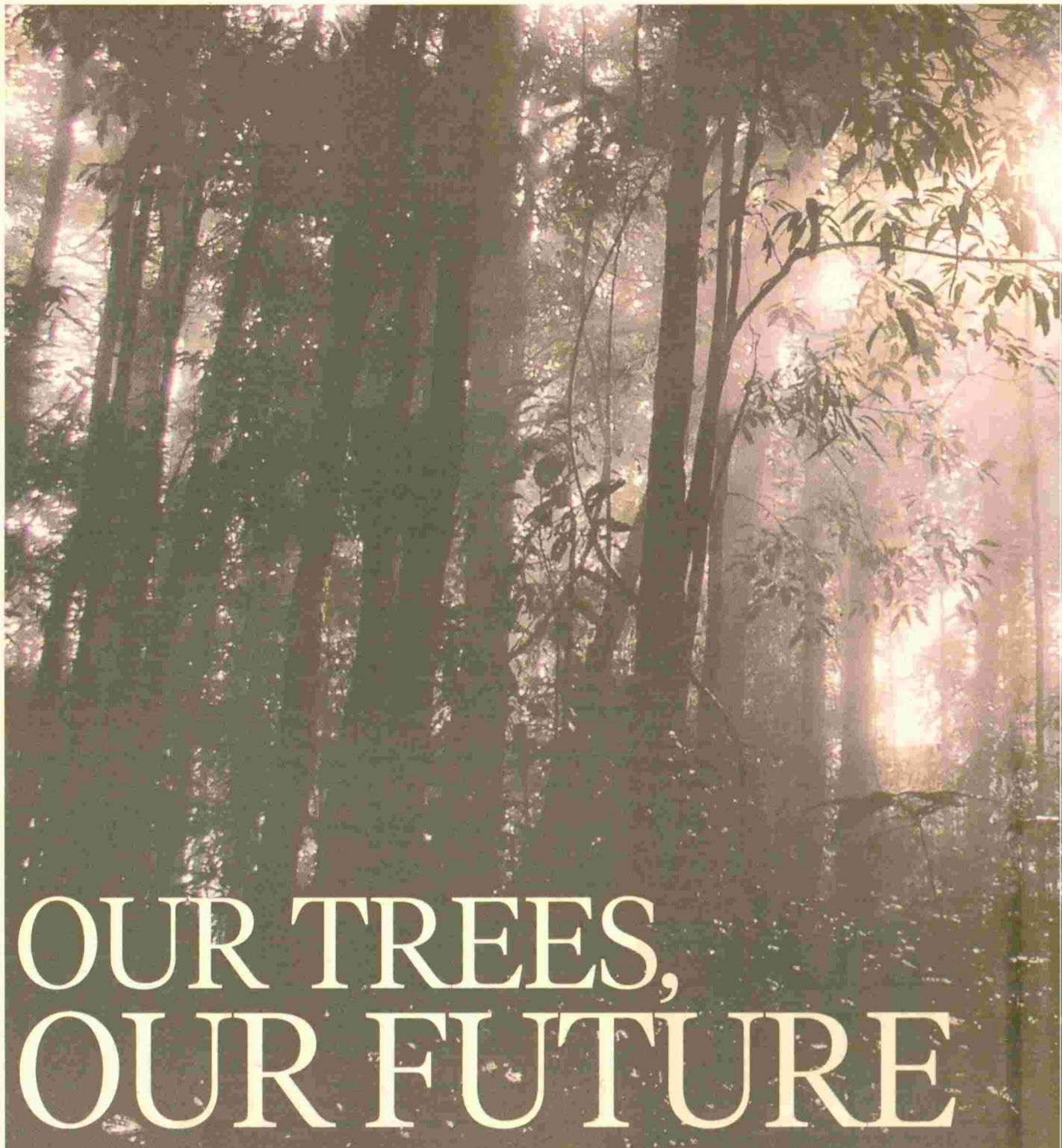


What: Save Our Rainforest Race

Where: Centre for Eco-Tourism Education Edutourism, Sungai Menyala Forest Reserve, Port Dickson, Negri Sembilan.

When: Saturday, March 26 (Registration closes 20 March).

www.pekamalaysia.org



OUR TREES, OUR FUTURE

We need to see, touch and feel our trees before we lose them completely, writes **Aneeta S**



Muddy waters and a lack of trees at the riverbank at Ulu Tembeling.

PICTURE COURTESY OF PEKA

what she calls the "rape of Mother Nature". Hands on hips, she exclaims: "Surely there are other ways of making money!"

GOING BACKWARDS

Indeed, Sabrina believes that our neighbours, such as Thailand, Laos and Vietnam have already made inroads in protecting their environment. In a damning testimony to what's happening around us, Sabrina states: "Malaysia is going backwards in terms of conservation and preservation of our rainforests."

Of particular concern to Sabrina is last year's landslide on the Karak Highway. As early as October 2013, the team at Peka noticed that land at the Lentang Recreational Forest was cleared for logging activities. Sabrina took a helicopter ride for a bird's eye view and was horrified. Trees near the water catchment area

and riverbanks were felled and illegal tracks into the jungle were made to facilitate uncontrolled logging. Armed with irrefutable evidence, she warned the authorities that if matters were not looked into, some natural disaster was bound to happen.

Shaking her head, she adds: "The more we tell them, the more these *penjenayah alam* (criminals against Nature) don't care."

This is why Sabrina wasn't entirely surprised that on Nov 11, 2015, heavy rains caused a landslide on the Karak Highway.

This abysmal picture that Sabrina paints about the state of our rainforests lends further support to what's already been said by many others. In fact, the World Wide Fund For Nature reports on its website that between 1983 and 2003, "there was a reduction of about 4.9 million hectares

cover story **GROOVE** BROUGHT TO YOU BY LIFE & TIMES



Sabrina is outraged at the damage inflicted on our rainforests.

PICTURE BY SHAHREEN ZAMZURI

we've already got some mechanisms in place to protect Mother Nature. We should do even more, particularly on the fringes of our forests to either slow down or prevent any activity that involves further depletion of our rainforests.

Likewise, 56-year-old Susee Rajaram, exco member of Peka, believes we have a responsibility to preserve and conserve our land for our children. Like Sabrina, she is not against logging outright. What both women would like to see is for such logging activities to be controlled and done properly.

Also, if those very same logging companies are making millions from their logging activities, they should channel some of their profits into reforesting the land.

Another idea Sabrina has mooted is that both the Federal and State governments should make it a priority to insist that at least 30 percent of the land in each state is preserved (current statistics show that the remaining primary forests in each state is no more than 15 per cent).

Finally, Sabrina takes a deep breath and, in a steady voice, concludes: "We must do what is right. I want Malaysians to see nature. See these trees. Touch them. Smell them. They must feel it inside. Feel that it's theirs."

Sundararaj

(about four times the size of Singapore) of forest cover in Malaysia."

This trend apparently continues in other rainforests as well, where trees are felled for logging or farming with the most endangered ones being in Africa and areas where human population doubles every 20 years or so.

HOLDING ON TO HOPE

Seeing that this race to save our rainforests seems to be heading nowhere, it begs the question, "Should we just give up?"

The answer is a resounding 'no' as far as Andrew Sebastian, CEO of Ecotourism & Conservation Society Malaysia, is concerned.

"We must have hope. Pick the silver lining and work with it," says the 46-year-old passionate conservationist. The "silver lining" he speaks of is in part the fact that



Quarters of the Forestry Department destroyed after heavy rains and mudslides.

PICTURE COURTESY OF PEKA