

# Royal Belum now a white area, off limits to loggers

**IPOH:** The Royal Belum was officially gazetted as a State Park last May 3, Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali said yesterday.

The gazetted area covers some 117,500ha of the total 300,000ha of the Belum-Temenggor forest reserve. The rainforests contained within the area are over 130 million years old.

He said this meant Royal Belum was now a permanent forest reserve and no logging would be allowed.

However, he added the security status of Royal Belum still remained, but it was no longer a "black area".

"Now it is a white area, but security forces are still needed

to monitor the forest regularly. "This is because Royal Belum borders Thailand and security surveillance is important to counter smuggling activities and illegal logging.

"Therefore those who wish to enter Royal Belum must have permission from the police and the State Parks Corporation," he said after chairing the State Executive Council meeting yesterday.

Tajol Rosli said initially the state government wanted to gazette 123,000ha of the Belum-Temenggor forest reserve as the Royal Belum State Park.

The figure included all the rivers that run through the forest. However, he said because

of the presence of the water dams, such as the Temenggor and Kenering dams, the maintenance of the rivers was now the responsibility of Tnaga Nasional Berhad.

"The state government will discuss with Tnaga Nasional to increase security surveillance at the rivers to prevent trespassers or those who try to enter Royal Belum without a permit through the river," he said, adding that a permit would be approved between three and seven days.

Tajol Rosli said to make it easier for nature lovers, jungle trekkers and visitors, the state government was preparing an online system for the entry permit.

The gazetting of Royal Belum has been a long awaited matter among environmentalists and nature lovers. Non-governmental organisations such as the Malaysian Nature Society had called on the state government to gazette it so that the priceless rainforests and flora and fauna there are fully protected.

However, what the MNS wanted was that the whole of the Belum-Temenggor forest reserve, and not only part of it, be gazetted because it is a contiguous forest and a major water catchment area.

It is also a national treasure trove of numerous plants and trees species supporting over 270 species of birds and over

100 types of mammals, including the endangered Malaysian tiger and Sumatran rhinoceros.

To this end the MNS embarked on a signature campaign from April to September, last year, and it collected over 80,000 signatures locally and from abroad, through special postcards.

The objective was to ensure that the Belum-Temenggor forest reserve be protected and left untouched.

The signed postcards, which includes the signature of National Resources and Environmental Minister Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid, are expected to be handed by the MNS council to Tajol Rosli soon.