

‘Stop illegal clearing near Bukit Merah lake’

DAMAGING: NGOs urge Perak govt to take stern action against encroachers

SYLVIA LOOI

BAGAN SERAI

sylvialooi@nst.com.my

FIVE non-governmental organisations have urged the state government to come down hard on encroachment on the forest reserve near the Bukit Merah reservoir.

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM), Persatuan Aktivis Sahabat Alam, Association for the Protection of Natural Heritage of Malaysia (Peka), Pertubuhan Alam Sekitar Sejahtera and Consumers Association of Penang estimated that illegal farm-

ers had encroached on 2,000ha of the 3,000ha reserve.

The group’s spokesman, SAM field researcher Meor Razak Meor Abdul Rahman, said the encroachment had been going on since 2010.

“The district office has told us through a letter in December 2012 that encroachment had occurred, but to date, nothing has been done to stop the activities. The farmers have grown bolder and are clearing more land.”

Speaking during a site visit at Pondok Tanjong near here on Sunday afternoon, Meor said fresh clearing had taken place, with a ditch being



Sahabat Alam-Malaysia field researcher Meor Razak Meor Abdul Rahman pointing at the encroached areas in the forest reserve near the Bukit Merah lake. Pic by Yahya Awang

constructed to allow water to be drained before activities were carried out.

“The forest reserve has been there since the colonial days. It was meant to be a buffer zone for the Bukit Merah lake.”

He said a district Irrigation and Drainage Department engineer disagreed with the activities on the reserve as it would affect the water table of the Kerian district.

Meor said the authorities had no

will to take action and that the district office should put up a signboard to warn those who trespassed that they would be charged.

“If the authorities are willing to get rid of the farmers, we will replant saplings to rehabilitate the land.”

The reservoir was in the limelight recently following the dry spell, which led to a drastic drop in the water level at the Bukit Merah lake.

Meor said it was a myth that the El Nino phenomenon had led to a drop

in the lake’s water level.

“It is due to human interference,” he said, adding that if action was not taken, farmers and consumers in the Kerian and Seberang Prai Selatan districts would face water disruptions.

Peka president Puan Sri Shariffa Sabrina Syed Akil, who was present, said water catchment areas should be left alone.

“Do not blame Mother Nature when she strikes back. Respect nature and it will respect mankind.”