

hollow hills

December 6, 2022

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Prompt:

Writers on Earth - Writing Competition 2022



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Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim,

Remember the last time you visited the beaches, the rainforests, the waterfalls hidden within hills. Remember the highway scenery between states: stretches of palm oil plantations and hills ripped apart for limestone and marble.

At 17, I've passed the limestone hills near Ipoh over numerous years with my family. And each time I see their shorn sides, lined with red-brown streaks, I wonder what they'd look like covered in nothing but what nature chooses. I've never seen them any other way, but I wonder if— at some point in your past— you did.

Limestone mining is hazardous for people and the environment and even affects these hills' histories. Limestone hills aren't exactly safe construction sites, especially with heavy rainfall. Overly disturbing them is a risk: the deaths at Banjaran Hotsprings two years ago were only one example of countless fatal limestone hill rock falls. Blasting the karst to get to limestone destroys wildlife, including the critically endangered Kanthan Cave trapdoor spider and goat-like serow in Perak. Undiscovered historical sites may get demolished by mining, unlike the lucky Neolithic paintings in Tambun's limestone hills.

I know Malaysia's economy partly relies on the quarry industry, but these resources are only finite. Sustainable uses exist for these hills, such as eco-tourism, as seen in the Kinta Valley National Geopark. And if quarrying is necessary for the time being, source limestone through sub-surface quarrying instead of blasting hills open because

it's the cheapest option. Monetary value is undoubtedly relevant but shouldn't be the decisive factor concerning ancient, biodiverse hills.

Hiking by towering trees and crimson rafflesias and vibrant flora and fauna— it's an experience I can't recreate. And I hope I don't have to lose that childlike wonder alongside nature's degradation. I wonder what it'd feel like if— when I get a driver's license— I could drive by untainted, rehabilitated hills.

This is only the surface of issues regarding nature's protection. Projects reclaiming land require mined materials, and clearing forests the size of KL pushes the environment's limit. Countless climate change and environmental issues must be tackled.

I'm only one voice, but you hold this country's speakerphone and the power to unite us in restoring Malaysia's natural beauty. Change disruptive quarrying permits; protect the hills. The odds you've overcome to lead and the odds you *can* overcome as a leader are boundless.

Sincerely,
a teenager dreaming of greener hills

Tags:

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Footnotes

<https://focusmalaysia.my/limestone-hills-beware-of-dangers-lurking-behind-its-scenic-beauty/>

<https://www.macaranga.org/the-true-value-of-limestone/>

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<https://consumer.org.my/protect-the-400-million-year-old-peraks-limestone-hills-from-exploitation/>