

KERATAN AKHBAR

TARIKH : 27 APRIL 2022
AKHBAR : NEW STRAITS TIMES
MUKA SURAT : 17

ECRL's environmental protection solutions a blueprint for future projects

EQUITABLE GROWTH

ECRL's environmental protection solutions a blueprint for future projects

WE should not paint a broad stroke in characterising any development as negative. Our country cannot progress if we do not build important infrastructure and invest in businesses to propel the economy.

As someone who moved from the hustle and bustle of the Klang Valley to "quieter" cities in the east coast, I know firsthand the need to balance development and the environment.

Having lived in Kota Baru for the past 25 years, the spate of economic progress is extremely disparate compared with my hometown of Kuala Lumpur.

What we need is development projects that uplift communities

and lead us down a more equitable growth trajectory. That should be a key consideration in any developmental agenda.

This is especially since Malaysia is home to a diverse ecology of flora and fauna. Our country is rich in biodiversity and it is the responsibility of all to protect it.

One infrastructure project which I believe can be used as a yardstick for the development-environment balance is the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL).

I was pleasantly surprised to learn that the design philosophy of the project emphasises a commitment to reduce environmental damage. Most recently, it was

reported that the mega rail project would use 90 per cent less forest land compared with earlier estimates — from 2,000ha to just over 270ha.

There are also ingenious solutions proposed to deal with encroachment on wildlife habitats using tunnels and wildlife crossings.

One place where this can be implemented is in Bukit Bauk, Terengganu, a natural habitat for wild Malayan tigers. All in all, the project is said to comprise 58 tunnels, 20 wildlife crossings and 128km of viaducts to help conserve as much forest and wildlife as possible.

I have yet to see or hear of any other large scale infrastructure project in the country that places as much importance to the environment as this.

To be fair, past modernisation projects cannot be faulted. We were living at a time of blissful ignorance of the impact of such development to our surroundings.

Now, we can no longer afford such luxury. Malaysia will continue to develop and she should. But this does not mean we should let up on our responsibility to cultivate and protect a safe and green environment for generations to come.

This is definitely a step in the right direction for the country as

more infrastructure projects are planned for the future in line with our post-pandemic development agenda. If the ECRL's environmental protection course of action is properly implemented, it can serve as a blueprint to all future development projects.

Stakeholders must realise now that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report alone does not suffice. It must be backed by legitimate and innovative solutions that prioritise economic advancement and environmental protection.

HARITH ISMAIL
Kota Baru, Kelantan