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Not enough experts to manage Botanic Gardens

BY K. SUTHAKAR

PENANG: The Penang Botanic Gardens is not being managed properly due to a lack of professional manpower.

Of the garden's 90 employees, only one – curator Lim Boon Tiong – is a professional.



NATURAL SURROUNDINGS: Visitors enjoying a day with nature at the Penang Botanic Gardens.

“The rest are agriculture assistants, gardeners and grass cutters,” said Datuk Dr Leong Yueh Kwong, who is heading a three-member panel to review the gardens' development and management.

He was commenting on the Auditor-General's Report 2005, which noted that the overall management of the gardens was unsatisfactory.

The report said the department should set up a research and training unit and increase the number of officers with technical expertise.

Dr Leong said the present management inherited the organisational structure of the 1960s.

“It has not been able to cope with the demands of the modernisation of botanic gardens which took place in countries such as Singapore and Thailand,” he added.

He said the panel, which was appointed early this year, would submit its report to the state government in about a month's time. The other panel members are Universiti Malaya's Botanic Gardens director Prof Wong Khoo Meng and Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) botanical garden director Dr Saw Leng Guan.

Dr Leong said the panel would propose the creation of between seven and 10 professional

posts to ensure the garden truly functioned like a conservation, horticultural and research centre.

“Among others, we are proposing the posts of botanist, education officer and horticulturalist,” he added.

Dr Leong said a botanist had been seconded to the garden early this year under a memorandum of understanding signed with FRIM.

He said the person was training the staff on various matters including the setting up of the herbarium.

State executive councillor Teng Chang Yeow described the audit report as “unfair” to the garden management.

He said the management could not hire staff without the approval of the Public Services Department.