



KEMENTERIAN TENAGA DAN SUMBER ASLI

## KERATAN SURAT KHABAR

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**Re-planting  
Malaysia  
the right way**





# Re-planting Malaysia the right way



Along with the tree-planting campaign, Ng thinks that existing forests should be protected to conserve biodiversity. — Filepic

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The tree planting campaign, which will run from 2021 until 2025, is not the first that Malaysia has embarked on, although it's the most impressive yet. Between 2010 and 2016, the country held a campaign to plant 26 million trees, and between 2015 and 2019, we targeted five million trees.

But just how effective these efforts have been is debatable. So what and how will it be different this time?

## Making an impact

For one thing, this time, the Federal Government is engaging conservation groups on how best to achieve the target of 100 million trees and, most importantly, for the campaign to have an actual impact on the environment.

"While we have a long way to go to achieve the target, rest assured that the government is not only looking at the numbers," said Dr Farrah Shameen Ashray, Energy and Natural Resources Ministry under-secretary in her opening remarks during the Greening Malaysia: 100 Million Trees Campaign webinar on May 25.

"I think we have a lot of concerns about that and we also know there are many sceptics.

"We went into this campaign, knowing there are many lessons to be learned... knowing that we have a lot of things to be improved along the way," she said.

Also present during the two-hour webinar were Forestry Department of Peninsular Malaysia deputy director-general Datuk Zahari Ibrahim, Sarawak Forest Department director Datuk Hamden Mohammad, Sabah Forestry Department Corporate Communication and Innovation Division head Karim Abdul Samad, Habitat Foundation's Dr Ahmad Zafir Abdul Wahab, and Tropical Rainforest Conservation Research Centre executive director Dr Dzaeman Dzulkifli.

Jointly organised by the Habitat Foundation and the Society for Conservation Biology, the webinar was part of a series designed to encourage discourse between the

ministry and environmental groups on how to make the campaign a success.

One thing that the ministry has learned from previous campaigns, said Farrah, is that much was done by government and state departments working in silos.

"This time, we want it to be done in a more structured and strategic approach," she said, adding that the ministry also wants the initiative to be "society-wide".

Conservation groups, companies, organisations, societies, even individuals – anyone and everyone – can take part in the campaign by registering at the ministry's website, 100jutapokok.gov.my, and the campaign's mobile app, Penghijauan Malaysia.

Elaborating later during the webinar, Forestry Department of Peninsular Malaysia's Zahari says some of the lessons learnt from previous efforts include the fact that such campaigns need more manpower in seed collection and an aggressive use of research and development if they are to succeed. Also, there was low public awareness about the importance of using quality planting stock.

"The main thing we need to understand is the complexity of our tropical rainforests," he stressed.

The campaign was launched by Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, who planted a merbau sapling on the grounds of Seri Perdana on Jan 5.

Farrah said that the 100jutapokok.gov.my website has registered 8.56 million trees to be planted. This is 42.8% of the target of planting 20 million trees a year, with the top two states being Sarawak with 4.75 million and Sabah with 1.43 million registered.

On Jan 9, Malaysia Forestry Department director-general Datuk Mohd Ridza Awang was reported by Bernama as saying that some of the tree species to be planted are the merbau, meranti temilaga and merawan sipit jantan, and that RM20m would be set aside for saplings, planting work and to upgrade nurseries.

The department currently has some 45 nurseries nationwide.

## Missing the forest for the trees

Botanist Dr Francis Ng thinks that simultaneously with the campaign, existing forests in Malaysia should be protected to conserve the thousands of species of other plants and countless other forms of life that are not trees.

He argues that all big trees over 60cm in diameter should be left to act as "mother" trees to reduce the damage when large logs are dragged out of the forest during logging.

"Only medium trees below two feet (60cm) in diameter should be cut. Leaving the big mother trees untouched will ensure better forest regeneration and environment protection.

"It would be wonderful if the Forestry Department could be rebranded as the Department of Forest Conservation and for the rules governing the extraction of trees from production forests to be changed in keeping with modern environmental values and expectations," says the former deputy director-general of the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia in response to queries from *The Star*.

Tropical Rainforest Conservation Research Centre's Dzaeman agrees, saying that it's still so much easier and cheaper to maintain natural ecosystems.

Pointing out that there is a threshold when the costs of restoration to make a degraded forest more functional becomes too high, he says it is important for any tree-planting campaign to designate priority areas.

"We look for sites that can serve multiple benefits. So that when a tree-planting programme is taking place, it can tick many different boxes.

"For example, planting trees in wildlife corridors identified by our national Central Forest Spine initiative can mean that we are not only planting trees but improving connectivity for endangered wildlife.

"Next, we look into ticking the boxes for plant conservation goals as well. For example, we have endangered trees so if we could improve their population by selecting endangered trees to



Penang Island City Council landscape department staff and members of several NGOs planting *Rhizophora apiculata* (bakau minyak) in Kuala Sungai Pinang, Balik Pulau, in December last year. The new tree planting campaign aims to be effective by ensuring departments and agencies will not work in silos. — ZAINUDIN AHAD/The Star