

Headline **Sticks in the mud to conserve mangroves**
Date **27 Dec 2009**
MediaTitle **New Sunday Times**
Section **Local News**
Journalist **N/A**
Frequency **Weekly**
Circ / Read **153,409 / 295,000**

Language **English**
Page No **20**
Article Size **449 cm²**
Color **Black/white**
ADValue **6,217**
PRValue **18,651**



Sticks in the mud to conserve mangroves

It took a disaster of global proportions five years ago for the world to wake up to the utility of mangroves. EVANGELINE MAJAWAT talks to mangrove conservationists to find out the latest developments in protecting them

IT took a deadly disaster to recognise the humble mangroves.

In pre-tsunami times, mangroves went unappreciated in the botanical world where the biggest, smallest or tallest were the winners.

But overnight, mangroves became a sensation after powerful walls of waves smashed the coasts on that fateful Boxing Day five years ago.

In the aftermath of the tsunami, stories abounded of how areas with dense mangroves were less affected such as the Pichavaram and Muthupet areas in Tamil Nadu, India.

Mangroves act as natural barriers from erosion and studies show that the trees can reduce the energy, height and intensity of a tsunami. They were nature's "bioshield".

While mangrove rehabilitation programmes flourished, the challenge was ensuring the survival of the seedlings.

Head of the Innovative Planting Technique Project for Mangroves Dr Raja Barizan Raja Sulaiman said mere rehabilita-

tion programmes were not enough as seedlings died almost as soon as they were planted.

"Our role is to develop planting methods in high-risk areas (of erosion). High tide usually washes the seedlings away," she said.

The survival rate of seedlings planted the traditional method is only between zero and 20 per cent in high-risk areas of erosion.

"During high tide, the mud turns more into (liquid). The roots have nothing to hold on to," she said.

Raja Baziran and her team have identified three methods — Comp-Mat, Comp-Pillow and Bamboo Encasement Method — that have yielded positive results.

Of the three, the Comp-Mat unit — a wire mesh cylinder holding a planting medium of coconut fibre and mud, has proven to be the most successful.

"With this method, the survival rate (of the seedlings) goes

up to 80 to 100 per cent," she said. "We're in the process of getting a patent for it."

The Innovative Planting Technique Project is just one of the many research and development projects carried out by the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) to rehabilitate mangroves.

These projects are part of a bigger plan under the National Task Force Committee of Planting Mangroves and Other Suitable Species Operation in Shoreline of the Country. The Natural Resources and Environment Ministry had formed the task force in 2006 with a budget of RM40 million.

Working closely with various non-governmental organisations, local universities and corporate companies, they had replanted close to five million mangrove trees in 1,819ha of coastline in Malaysia.

Mangrove rehabilitation is expected to remain centre-stage as it is one of the ministry's key performance indicators.

The ministry has identified the five states battered by the tsunami — Perak, Kedah, Perlis, Penang and Selangor — to focus on next year.

Raja Baziran said FRIM is now in the midst of teaching the planting method to officials in these states.

But conservationists say efforts to preserve existing tracts

of forests must be intensified.

"Often, we underestimate the expertise, cost and effort needed to rehabilitate mangroves," World Wide Fund for Nature (Malaysia) chief executive officer Datuk Dr Dionysius Sharma said.

He said restoring mangroves was difficult.

"We should learn from that example (tsunami). We need to ensure that all existing mangroves are allowed to remain standing," he said.

"The real value is knowing and appreciating the intrinsic value of the mangroves."

■ news@nst.com.my

Headline **Sticks in the mud to conserve mangroves**
Date **27 Dec 2009**
MediaTitle **New Sunday Times**
Section **Local News**
Journalist **N/A**
Frequency **Weekly**
Circ / Read **153,409 / 295,000**

Language **English**
Page No **20**
Article Size **449 cm²**
Color **Black/white**
ADValue **6,217**
PRValue **18,651**



The lives of many inshore fishermen were saved by the mangroves of Kuala Sungai Pinang, Penang, when the Boxing Day Tsunami hit in 2004.