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Malaysian scientist a green trailblazer

MELBOURNE: When it comes to saving the world's forests, Malaysian scientist Tan Sri Dr Salleh Mohd Nor has probably done more than any other University of Adelaide graduates in the past 50 years, the university's alumni magazine "Lumen" says in an article to mark the 2011 International Year of Forests.

The Colombo Plan scholar, who obtained a Bachelor of Science (Forestry) in 1964, is internationally renowned for his research work in tropical forests, particularly in the Asia Pacific region.

Since the late 1960s, when he oversaw Malaysia's first national forest inventory and was later appointed the director-general of the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM), Dr Salleh has campaigned tirelessly for the

conservation of forests, winning numerous awards along the way. "Forests are amazing places.

They are peaceful, safe, pristine, uplifting, and so essential to our ecosystems and our lives," the magazine quotes Dr Salleh as saying.

Dr Salleh's major contributions to forestry management include his role in creating a number of national parks in Malaysia; development of national policy on land use and forest conservation; and making governments accountable for actions that are not environmentally friendly or sustainable.

In a career spanning more than four decades, he developed FRIM to become the top tropical forest research organisation in the world, winning various awards, including the National

Science Award.

In the 100-year history of the International Union of Forestry Research Organisations (the global umbrella organisation for world forestry research), Dr Salleh was the first president from outside the United States and Europe.

Dr Salleh was also instrumental in forming the Asia Pacific Association of Forestry Research Institutions (APAFRI), and was a member of numerous boards and committees of various global organisations.

Even in retirement he continues to consult on forestry management and the environment and heads up Malaysia's only approved private contract research company, TropBio Research Sdn Bhd. "There are so many challenges facing the

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forestry industry, particularly with new issues of climate change and loss of biodiversity," he says.

"It's important that we conserve our natural heritage in its pristine state and one of the most effective ways we can do this is to ban the production of all forms of greenhouse gases and plastic.

"We must also phase out logging of our natural forests because they have greater value as water catchments and for conserving our biodiversity.

"As for our long-term timber needs, trees can be grown as plantations and research by FRIM has shown that rubber wood and oil palm trunks are good timber substitutes, as well as being fast-growing tree species," he says. - Bernama