

Headline
Date
MediaTitle
Section
Journalist
Frequency
Circ / Read

LESSONS FROM MOTHER NATURE
16 Jan 2011
New Sunday Times
Learning Curves
N/A
Weekly
156,910 / 295,000

Language
Page No
Article Size
Color
ADValue
PRValue

English
H1to3
1334 cm²
Full Color
39,460
118,381



LESSONS FROM MOTHER NATURE

H2-3

Picture courtesy of Wo Su Shyan

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Picture perfect

**A photography contest inspires students to do their bit for society, writes
NURJEHAN MOHAMED**

MOTHER Nature is a great teacher. And a group of Taylor's University students recently learnt some valuable lessons by capturing her in all her glory.

Some 40 students made their way to Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) for a photography contest organised by the School of Computing and IT (SOCIT) last August.

The competition, titled IT's Green @ FRIM, was open to all students of the university to educate them on green computing habits.

Aside from sponsored prizes, the 12 best entries got spots in Taylor's 2011 calendar, which is being sold to raise funds for the 1Taylor's-Bario Community Engagement Project.

The Bario project is part of Taylor's Education Group's corporate social responsibility initiative to help rural schoolchildren in Sabah and Sarawak.

Since 2007, the group has built hostels at SK Mengaris and SK Koromoko, both in Kota Marudu, Sabah.

Last year, the aim was to build one at SK Bario, Kelabit

Highland, Sarawak.

The result of the photography competition is the 2011 desktop calendar, which is available from the Taylor's Corporate Communications Department.

The calendar features 12 photos and accompanying captions conveying green messages from nine students.

The photos look professional, belying the fact that they were taken by young photography enthusiasts. One student's entries were taken with an entry-level compact digital camera.

In keeping with the environmental theme, the dominant colour throughout, unsurprisingly, is green.

Aside from the first two pages

that give information on the institution and the project, there is hardly any indication that this is an institution's calendar.

The only blemish is the lack of details on Malaysian public holidays — it only indicates the ones celebrated nationally or in the Klang Valley, which may limit its appeal.

Still, the eye-catching graphics and the fact that the proceeds of the RM20 calendar goes entirely to the Bario project may encourage sales.

Daniel Ting, Wo Su Shyan, Lau Shyh Tzer and Arindam Sarkar — whose pictures are featured in the calendar — say they had joined the competition because of a love for photography.

"Besides photography being one of my hobbies, I had signed up to support a SOCIT event," says Ting, a Foundation in Computing student.

Arindam, a Bachelor of IT student from Calcutta, India, had joined because he felt the natural surroundings at FRIM

was a good place to test out his new compact camera.

For Lau, the motivation to take part was the venue — he had never visited FRIM prior to the contest.

Wo, on the other hand, was happy to do something for charity, albeit indirectly.

Although the four initially had one goal in mind — to get winning shots — they came away with a keener interest to help solve social and environmental problems.

"After learning about the Bario project in Sarawak and the issues affecting SK Bario schoolchildren, I realise how lucky we are in Kuala Lumpur.

"The people there don't even have proper infrastructure such as reliable water and electricity supply," says Wo, who has just completed her degree in Computer Science.

She has since started saving energy whenever she can and persuading her friends to do the same.

Arindam has practised water and power conservation from childhood because India is an energy deficient country.

"I was glad to know that a place such as FRIM exists here; I wish the city had this greenery

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everywhere rather than just in an enclosed area," he says.

Ting says the competition gave him a better appreciation for nature.

"Looking at things we normally overlook and capturing the many faces of Mother Nature made me realise this is something I want future generations to have too," he says.

As the use of technology increases in the world, he feels it is up to Computing students to spearhead the green IT movement.

"There are always cheaper ways of doing things but they are not necessarily ethical or environmentally friendly," he says.

The 20-year-old has started practising some of the lessons

learnt during the event — such as putting his computer into

hibernation instead of standby mode and finding the most efficient way to complete tasks as opposed to taking short cuts.

This change in habit goes beyond computing. For instance, he is now also more careful about the amount of water he uses while washing his hands or brushing his teeth.

Lau, like his peers, has become more aware of his carbon footprint.

"Everyday actions such as turning off the power of electrical products when they're not in use may seem small but every single simple step makes a difference," says the Bachelor of Computer Science student.

Taking part in the photography contest also inspired the 20-year-old

to do more for society.

Lau initiated a Children Behind Us programme with some friends to educate Somalian refugee children in Puchong. Children Behind Us is a youth-led initiative which aims to provide underprivileged children with basic education.

"We met with the founder who did the pilot in Jakarta and he guided us on how to work with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees," he says.

For him, the most pertinent lesson he learnt from SOCIT's event was the importance of caring for the planet and taking action.

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For details on the Bario project and Taylor's 2011 calendar, contact Caren Lee at 03-5629-5197 or caren.lee@taylors.edu.my

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