

Headline	Taking trees online		
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Taking trees online

FRIM aims to digitally document all its assets to share with the world

By JADE CHAN

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Photos by CHAN TAK KONG

FANCY finding out where the *chengal* trees are located in the Forest Research Institute Malaysia and their life cycle, or get a virtual view of FRIM's Canopy Walkway?

All this will soon be made possible with Digital FRIM, a project to digitally document all the trees and other interesting features in FRIM for better management and conservation of resources, and greater sharing of information with the public.

"Once it is successfully carried out, the project will become intellectual property for the country," said FRIM director-general Datuk Dr Abdul Latif Mohmod, who was representing the Malaysian Forestry Research and Development Board at the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Cube Global Sdn Bhd, a company specialising in forestry and digital mapping.

"The collaboration with Cube Global will contribute to FRIM's efforts to compile and document all relevant information on its flora, fauna, and other living and non-living assets, which is important for FRIM's preparation towards achieving the Unesco World Heritage Site status by

2015," he added.

The collaboration is expected to result in the development and implementation of an innovative system for documenting forest features, like tree species, size, flowering and fruiting patterns, and information on their uses in a digital format that can be easily retrieved and viewed.

The digital documentation of FRIM's features will serve as a permanent geo-spatial record for the reference of future generations, as well as help create a "virtual FRIM" that can be globally connected and interacted with in real time.

The forest information and data collected using this system will,

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among other things, be crucial for the conservation and sustainable management of precious resources,

monitoring and preventing illegal logging, and promoting carbon stock trading.

The MoU will also provide FRIM researchers with opportunities to explore new research areas in forest resource surveys and mapping, animation, eco-tourism, ICT and environmental education.

Cube Global Sdn Bhd chief executive officer Azman Ali M. Habib Rahman said Digital FRIM will cost no less than RM5mil and that the company is looking at engaging local investors to fund the project.

"Cube Global developed some in-house applications that will be used for the project. We believe that this initiative, which will be mutually beneficial to both parties, can be taken to a global scale," he said.

While the MoU is for five years, Abdul Latif said they are looking at having Digital FRIM completed within the next two to three years to help it achieve Unesco World Heritage Site target.

"FRIM has already taken the initial step with work to survey and mark plot boundaries and research site sub-plots.

"As a result, we were able to obtain a complete base map that will enable a more organised and efficient management planning of

Research sites easily managed using Digital FRIM

the research sites," he said, adding that some 200 scientists in FRIM and 200 to 300 students will be involved in the project.

Abdul Latif said all the information on the 5.6ha initial site will be up by the end of this year.

"The documentation of the forest will be carried out on a sustainable basis," he said.

"With Digital FRIM, the entire process in the world of tropical forestry can be shared with the whole world. We want FRIM to be accessible to everybody in the world.

"Anyone will be able to find out how many layers there are in the forest, when a *tualang* tree flowers, bears fruit and the animals it

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attracts, and the ways and means to protect the various plants."

Abdul Latif added that FRIM will also be launching a new SMS system that allows the public and researchers alike access to information on the trees in FRIM that are tagged to the system.

Multimedia Development Corp (MDeC) chief executive officer Datuk Badlisham Ghazali, who witnessed the MoU signing, said MDeC supported the vision of Digital FRIM which encompasses technology and environmental protection.

"This initiative will raise the country's level of competitiveness as more foreign investors are looking into the sustainability and long-term impact that projects have on the environment," he said.

FRIM's main campus in Kepong will be the site of the pilot project for Digital FRIM.

Once the system is fully developed and refined, it can be used to document the nine research stations under FRIM and other forest areas.

"FRIM is looking at working with the Forestry Department to

expand the digital project to other forests to encourage total integrity in forestry, particularly in the area of research and development," said Abdul

Latif.

The Digital FRIM project is in line with the Digital Malaysia Masterplan's aim to accelerate the country's economic growth through innovation, leveraging on the nation's strength in ICT, which is one of the 12 key economic areas identified to promote national economic growth under the 10th Malaysia Plan.

Abdul Latif highlighted that FRIM has been ranked among the best forestry research institutes in the world in a list issued by the Spanish National Research Council.

"FRIM was ranked the first in tropical forestry research, fourth forestry research institute and 546th out of 4,000 research institutes specialising in various fields," he said.

FRIM, which was founded in 1929, sits on a 512ha site adjacent to the Bukit Lagong Forest Reserve in the Kepong municipality.

It was gazetted as a natural heritage in Feb 2009 under the National Heritage Act 2005.

FRIM's research activities are organised under six divisions — forestry and environment, forest biodiversity, forest products, biotechnology, natural products, and research planning and corporate.

It also offers various attractions and activities, including nature

trails, waterfalls, nature education centre, museum and research gallery, camping and picnic sites, botanic gardens and 150m Canopy Walk.

Anyone will be able to find out how many layers there are in the forest, when a tualang tree flowers, bears fruits and the animals it attracts, and the ways and means to protect the various plants.

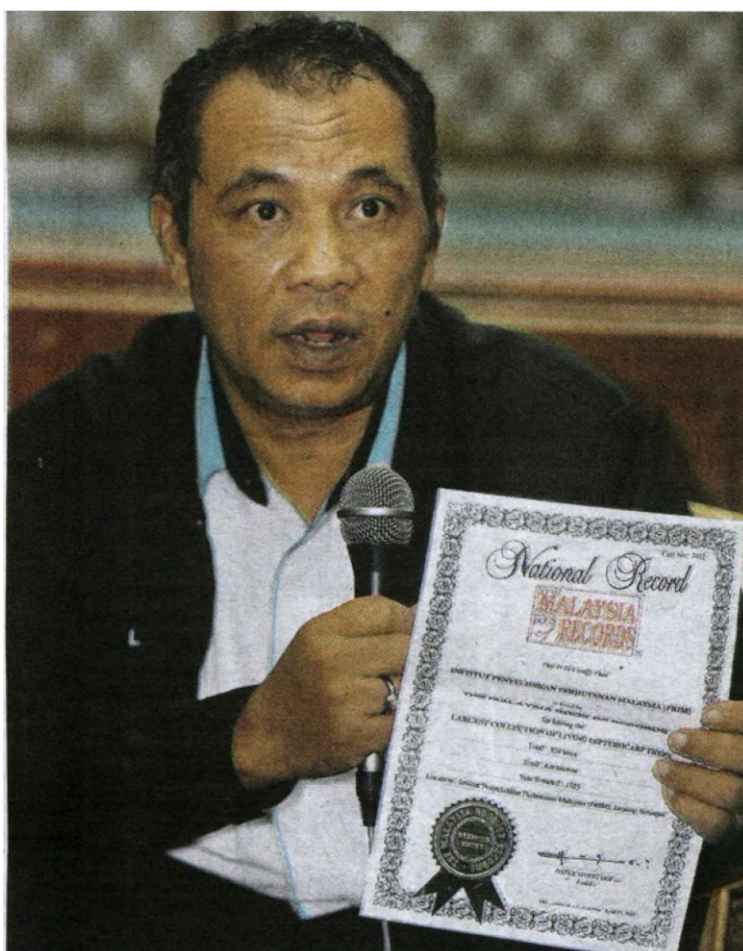
— DATUK DR ABD LATIF MOHMUD

RM5mil

> Cost of Digital FRIM project

> Number of scientists involved: **200**

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Multiple recognition: Abdul Latif showing one of the six National Records certificates FRIM received from the Malaysia Book of Records during the World Forestry Day celebration in March.

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Scenic drive: FRIM in Kepong offers a quick escape into nature. -- filepic

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Going digital: Abdul Latif (second from left) and Azman shaking hands after the MoU signing for Digital FRIM. Present to witness the event were Badlisham (right) and FRIM Natural Forest and Environment director Dr Shamsudin Ibrahim.

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Experience nature: The 150m Canopy Walk is one of the many attractions at FRIM. – filepic