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Perlis' Mata Ayer teak forest, a nature's gem

PADANG BESAR: The teakwood research station located in Mata Ayer, belongs to the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM), and is home to a variety of teak species found in this region and the country.

Located within a 10-minute ride from the Malaysia-Thai border in Padang Besar, and at close proximity to the shopping haven of Wang Kelian, this research station is also home to numerous teak species, including an indigenous species that was brought in from Langkawi Island in 1953.

The other teakwood species of the Mata Ayer plantation originate from various locations on the Peninsula, and from Thailand, Indonesia, India, Papua New Guinea, Trinidad and Sabah.

The 300-hectare plantation is lined with giant teak trees, which are sturdy and huge, with some reaching up to 30 metres in height.

Here, the growth of tropical hardwood trees is monitored, measured and recorded for future reference. Teak is a hardwood species that is most sought after by the construction and furniture industries.

Continuous research has enabled the cloning of new teak trees with improved features like faster maturity.

In Mata Ayer, the teak tree plantation provides a captivating panorama and a refreshing ambience that attracts nature lovers and those who advocate sustainability of natural resources.

Therefore, the eco-tourism infrastructure is also being developed at the research station for those who want a retreat within these natural surroundings.

The plantation is located along the main road in Mata Ayer, and it easily comes into the view of anyone passing the road.

The Mata Ayer Research Station, established in 1974, plays an important role in preserving the teakwood species while being the resource centre for high value woods.

According to Dr Mohd Zaki Abdullah, the coordinator for research plantation, the Perlis Forestry Department has planted more than 625 hectares of land in Perlis with teak trees.

"The teak trees in Mata Ayer are not only among the oldest, but also among the first to be replanted using the original clone from Langkawi.

"More interestingly, there is one tree with a diameter of 75 centimeters. That is really big for a teak tree," said Mohd Zaki while walking towards the tree with FRIM's Director General Datuk Dr Abdul Latif Mohmod.

The saplings from a few selected teakwood species are also sold to those who want to plant teak on their own.

"These trees are closely observed when they flower and fruit. Only the seeds that are harvested from the trees are sown, the ones that drop to the ground are not suitable for breeding," explained Mohd Zaki while pointing to the seeds on the grayish brown branches above.

"The distance between each tree in a row is three metres, meanwhile the distance between each row is four metres. Such adequate spacing will enable the teak trees to grow straight up, which is a characteristic that adds value to the teak trees," he said.

Numerous activities are conducted

to identify new teak clones, and for the clones of other high value woods like mahogany, acacia, khaya, sungkai and bamboo.

The financial returns from teakwood are the highest when the trees are harvested after 20 years, at a time when the wood is most suited for making furniture and in construction, e.g. in a wooden staircase.

The teak tree clones at a high growth rate and the wood can also be utilised for aromatherapy as well.

In the event that the trees are harvested in less than 10 years, the wood grain deprives the teak of its uniqueness, thus reducing its commercial value.

"For 15 metric tonnes of teak will fetch up to RM15 million," explained Abdul Latif.

Anyone keen on cultivating teak will be able to derive its economic potential in 20 years time.

The green trees also help to save earth especially due to their ability to reduce greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Abdul Latif pointed out that nearly 50 per cent of the jungles in Malaysia are still maintained and preserved.

The teakwood, added Abdul Latif, when replanted would help to refresh the environment in addition to providing commercial value.

In conclusion, SPF Mata Ayer has a noble goal to transform the teakwood plantation into an iconic attraction for the state of Perlis.

Other than that, SPF Mata Ayer is committed to fulfilling its aspirations of emerging as the leading Teakwood Research and Resource Centre of the region, by promoting forestry and eco-tourism to the public. - Bernama