

Headline	The Sungkai Man		
MediaTitle	The Star		
Date	12 Feb 2016	Color	Full Color
Section	StarTwo	Circulation	338,368
Page No	6,7	Readership	1,032,000
Language	English	ArticleSize	1874 cm²
Journalist	Majorie Chiew	AdValue	RM 62,269
Frequency	Daily	PR Value	RM 186,807



The Sungkai Man

A retired police superintendent has found a new calling in life – and he is out to share his love with the world.

Stories by MAJORIE CHIEW
star2@thestar.com.my

DURING his days in the police force, former crime buster Shye Ming Chung travelled the length and breadth of Sabah. He was a familiar figure among the rural folks and was well acquainted with issues that affected the community. Their chief concern was the fast-depleting forest which was their main source of sustenance.

Shye's stint in Keningau, Sabah, in the 1980s and 90s brought him to remote villages and timber logging sites. He saw first-hand the rampant logging activities.

When he was transferred to Tawau in 1992, he came across the same bleak scenario of rapid deforestation. His heart ached to do something for the indigenous people.

Shye, who was then a police superintendent with no background in forestry science, read extensively on tree species and environmental preservation.

As chance would have it, in 1994, Shye met a friend who shared his passion and vision. The duo headed to Hatyai and Trang in Southern Thailand, for a study tour of tree species in several private plantations.

Shye, who retired in 1996, set up a nursery in Tawau. His business partner started planting sungkai trees (*Peronema canescens*) in the nursery. Sungkai is also known as White Teak because of the colour of its wood. After two years, the young trees shot up to 4m in height; they grew straight and uniformly.

The then director-general of the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM), Datuk Dr Abdul Razak Mohd Ali, visited the nursery and was impressed by the rapid growth and characteristics of the sungkai trees. He encouraged Shye to continue his study of the species.

Later, FRIM sent researcher Dr Ahmad Zuhaidi Yahya to Shye's nursery to conduct a study of the sungkai species and bring seedlings back to Kuala Lumpur.

In 2001, Shye started the Sabapuri Nursery in Telipok, Kota Kinabalu, together with business partner Leo Chin. Two months after starting his Telipok nursery, Shye convinced his brother-in-law, Gilbert Teo, to plant sung-

kai trees on his uncultivated 5ha plot of land in Kawang, Kota Kinabalu. By the end of that year, Teo had 1,000 trees.

"The plot is now the biggest demo plot of sungkai trees in Kinarut. Teo would not even allow me to cut down a single sungkai tree. He loved the shady trees and scenic view so much that he built his house there!" said Shye, 73.

Shye's breakthrough came in September 2004 when he was invited by Dr Aminuddin Mohamad, former dean of the School of International Tropical Forestry (SITF), Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), and Dr Ludwig Kammesheidt (technical advisor to the Malaysian German Forestry Education Project) to collaborate with SITF researchers on several research projects in Telipok and Kinarut.

Kammesheidt was very impressed with the sungkai's characteristics. It is a very fast growing species which thrives well in poor soil. He noted that the sungkai has good properties comparable to the European ash wood, a hardwood species.

Awang Ahmad Mohd Yunus, a senior lecturer from UMS, conducted further research on the commercial potential of sungkai.

In May 2014, Shye signed a formal agreement for joint research activities with UMS researchers. They would hold symposiums, workshops and seminars on the sustainability of reforestation with sungkai trees.

"Normal hardwood species take 25 to 30 years before they can be harvested. But with sungkai, we can harvest them after seven or eight years if they are properly cared for. Sungkai trees are being introduced in forestry and agroforestry. They can be planted at the perimeters of oil palm plantations and for landscaping," said Shye.

Shye is a member of the joint Research and Development committee of SITF. Due to his dedicated research work on sungkai trees, his friends and fellow researchers at UMS nicknamed him, the Sungkai Man.

After more than 18 years of painstaking research on this forest species, Shye is convinced that the sungkai has potential to produce an abundant supply of quality timber for the country.



1 Shye convinced his brother-in-law to plant sungkai trees on his 5ha plot of land in Kawang, Kota Kinabalu. Today the trees are 14 years old. — SHYE MING CHUNG

2 The sungkai tree is a lightweight tropical hardwood with beautiful linear grain. — YEE LAI LIN

Headline	The Sungkai Man		
MediaTitle	The Star		
Date	12 Feb 2016	Color	Full Color
Section	StarTwo	Circulation	338,368
Page No	6,7	Readership	1,032,000
Language	English	ArticleSize	1874 cm²
Journalist	Majorie Chiew	AdValue	RM 62,269
Frequency	Daily	PR Value	RM 186,807



A sungkai seedling. — YEE LAI LIN

Valuable timber

Sungkai trees make an excellent alternative for reforestation.

SUNGKAI trees are ideal for the environment and enrichment of the forest as they produce valuable timber, says Leo Chin, 53, a businessman who started a sungkai tree nursery.

He ventured into this field because, like his business partner Shye Ming Chung, he too, is interested in preserving the environment. Shye is a pioneer in the planting of sungkai trees in Sabah and Sarawak.

"Sungkai trees are most suitable for reforestation, agroforestry (in oil palm lands) and landscaping (by the roadside)," says Chin. "Sungkai tree planting in Sabah is still in its testing stage in Tamparuli (2,000 seedlings) and Tawau (600 trees). Sarawak has also started planting sungkai trees (3,000 stumps) in Miri. So far, sungkai trees have not been planted in Peninsular Malaysia."

The sungkai tree is a lightweight tropical hardwood with beautiful linear grain. It has multiple usage and its timber fetches a good price in the market, says Shye.

The trees can be easily planted as they thrive well in poor soil. They have light branching and small tree crowns, and are suitable for planting at the perimeters of oil palm plantations, by the roadside and on steep terrain. The trees make scenic surroundings and produce good timber when they are alternately logged.

Shye reckons there is a future in planting sungkai trees. "These trees have excellent market value. The planting of this species will enhance environmental preservation and enrich the forest," he adds.