

Headline	Ex-cop appreciates forest after Sabah posting		
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KOTA KINABALU: A former crime buster's stint in Keningau and witnessing illegal logging and rapid depletion of forests made him determined to do something.

Shye Ming Chung travelled to remote villages and timber logging sites and saw first-hand the rampant logging activities in the 1980s and 90s.

When he was transferred to Tawau in 1992, he came across the same bleak scenario of rapid deforestation.

Shye, who was then a police superintendent, read extensively on tree species and environmental preservation.

In 1994, he 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, together with business partner Leo Chin. Two months after starting his Telipok nursery, Shye convinced his brother-in-law, Gilbert Teo, to plant sungkai trees on his uncultivated 5ha plot 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

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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 SITE.

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.

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**Shye standing next to some of the 14-year-old sungkai trees.
Inset: The sungkai tree is a lightweight tropical hardwood
with beautiful linear grain.**