

Headline	BRainS to drive home urgency of saving rainforests		
MediaTitle	New Straits Times		
Date	18 Oct 2016	Color	Full Color
Section	Local News	Circulation	74,711
Page No	26	Readership	240,000
Language	English	ArticleSize	482 cm ²
Journalist	N/A	AdValue	RM 16,551
Frequency	Daily	PR Value	RM 49,653



BRainS to drive home urgency of saving rainforests

KUALA LUMPUR: More than 100 international and local scientists, policymakers, forest administrators and conservationists have gathered at the Belum-Temenggor rainforest for six days, starting yesterday, for the inaugural Belum Rainforest Summit 2016 (BRainS 2016).

This is the first time a summit devoted entirely to the rainforest is being held in one of the oldest rainforests in the world.

While international and local experts discuss and debate the issues affecting rainforests globally, they would be able to see and experience the beauty of the 130 million-year-old Belum-Temenggor forest.

Hosting a summit in the rainforest presented a whole set of logistical challenges, but for the organisers, the Pulau Banding Foundation, the effort is worth it.

For one, a summit within the rainforest will drive home the urgency and necessity of a concerted action to save and protect tropical rainforests from devastation and exploitation.

Secondly, it would introduce and generate greater awareness of the Belum-Temenggor rainforest and its treasure trove of endangered species of plants and animals to the world.

Thus, BRainS 2016, in essence, is a summit for the rainforest, about the rainforest and in the rainforest.

It will not only focus on solutions for conservation but will explore alternative ways for the sustainable use of the rainforests.

As a result, there will be discussions on tackling climate change issues, global funding opportunities, payment of ecosystem services and green and sustainable investment.

The idea of a summit to bring in international experts from multiple disciplines to Belum had al-

ways been the aim of the Pulau Banding Foundation.

The foundation itself was created years ago, when Emkay Group purchased an island in the middle of the Belum-Temenggor water reservoir.

Emkay founder Tan Sri Mustapha Kamal decided then that such pristine beauty should be preserved for future generations.

With the assistance and support of the state authorities and the local community, the Emkay Group developed the Pulau Banding Charter which, among other goals, aims to ensure that development in the area would be conducted in a sustainable manner and with the interest of the local community in mind.

This led to the establishment of the Pulau Banding Foundation to promote and lead research and development efforts in Belum-Temenggor.

The foundation, which already had experience conducting scientific expeditions into the Belum-Temenggor rainforest and hosting symposiums to report their findings, wanted to accomplish something on a bigger scale — a conference that would not only highlight the biodiversity of Belum-Temenggor but the issues affecting rainforests globally.

This culminated in the inaugural BRainS 2016 which it hopes would be the beginning of a long-term commitment towards managing rainforests sustainably.

The Pulau Banding Foundation is the primary organiser of BRainS 2016 and it is due to its dedicated efforts that the summit became a reality.

It is supported by many organisations including the Malaysian Nature Society, the Malaysian Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, **Forest Research Insti-**

tute Malaysia (FRIM), and international bodies, such as BirdLife International and the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO), which is testament to the relevance and timeliness of an event that draws the attention to Belum Rainforest and other tropical rainforests.

Belum-Temenggor is divided into two main sections. Upper Belum was legally gazetted as the Royal Belum State Park and, therefore, is under government protection.

Visitors are allowed in but only with permission from the Perak state government.

Lower Belum, or the Temenggor Forest Reserve, is a production forest where development is allowed under strict conditions.

Collectively, the Belum-Temenggor forest complex is a massive tropical rainforest that stretches all the way northwards past the southern border of Thailand and eastwards to Taman Negara.

Over the years, the Belum-Temenggor rainforest has remained relatively untouched and is home to 14 of the world's most threatened mammals.

The jungle trails on Pulau Banding, one of the islands on Temenggor Lake, offer a glimpse of the vast beauty of the ancient rainforest.

During the summit, participants will explore Pulau Banding and venture inside the rainforest.



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