

Headline	Four M'sian plant species gone forever		
MediaTitle	Daily Express (KK)		
Date	20 Jun 2017	Color	Full Color
Section	Nation	Circulation	25,055
Page No	11	Readership	75,165
Language	English	ArticleSize	782 cm ²
Journalist	N/A	AdValue	RM 4,028
Frequency	Daily (EM)	PR Value	RM 12,084



Four M'sian plant species gone forever

KUALA LUMPUR:

Malaysia has permanently lost four species of plants, and almost 37pc are at risk of being extinct.

Malaysia is one of 17 mega biodiverse countries in the world, along with countries like Brazil, Indonesia, India and China.

There are over 8,800 vascular plant species (including tree and non-tree species) in Peninsular Malaysia; 15,000 in Malaysia.

Over a period of seven years beginning 2006, the Forest Research Institute Malaysia's (FRIM) biodiversity team assessed 1,132 species of vascular plants in Peninsular Malaysia and discovered the above statistics of the threatened plants.

The four species gone forever in Peninsular Malaysia are the herbaceous plant known as asam batu (scientific name: *Begonia eiromischa*); the timber species called damar hitam (*Shorea kuantanensis*) and the ferns *Oreogrammitis crispata* and *Oreogrammitis kunstleri*.

"There are two main reasons for extinction: one, a species is endemic to the area and once it's gone, it's gone forever; two, the species is only found in small quantities," said FRIM director-general Datuk Dr Abd Latif Mohmod.

Abd Latif added that another problem is when land is cleared for plantations, there is no check done to find out what

species grow there.

Among the conservation actions taken by FRIM to-date are the setting up of a Botanical Research and Herbarium Management System, and the publication of a book, Malaysia Plant Red List (2010), which lists out the threatened Dipterocarpaceae plant species in the country from the 1,132 species analysed so far.

"That's just the beginning; the work is ongoing as FRIM needs to list out and go through all the 15,000 species," said FRIM Forest Biodiversity Division director Dr Lilian Chua, who was also present at the press conference.

In 2008, FRIM also launched its Malaysia Biological Diversity Clearing House Mechanism (MyCHM) website, which evolved from FRIM's earlier initiative to establish a website focusing on flora information.

In 2010, MyCHM was enhanced to facilitate easier public access to biodiversity data, in line with the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry's aspiration of turning the website into a one-stop repository for Malaysia's biodiversity information.

The newer version incorporated, among other things, smart search features.

With the increase in biodiversity data and the need to introduce data analysis, a new MyCHM website was developed in 2014 and rebranded as the Malaysia Biodiversity Information System (MyBIS).

In December last year, Malaysia beat 104 countries to win the Gold Award under the new CHM category at COP13 13th

meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity held in Cancun, Mexico.

The award was accorded to Malaysia for making the most progress in the development of its national biodiversity CHM.

(A Clearing-House Mechanism serves to promote and facilitate technical and scientific cooperation within and between countries and act as a global mechanism for exchanging and integrating information on biodiversity).

"MyBIS is driven by the collection of specimens and by research. It is not a static system but a dynamic one. The amount of data will keep increasing with more partners being involved," said Chua.

To date, the database records information on nearly 39,000 species of flora and fauna. It includes over 2,500 pictures, conservation status of 1,062 plants, 480 biodiversity experts, and 1,069 publications.

"The latest version of the website allows for data analysis which is very important to us to assist in decision-making. It's useful for the public too, as they can find out, for example, what species (of plants and also animals) are endemic to say, Pahang," said Chua.

The development of the current system is in line with Malaysia's National Policy on Biological Diversity. It is also part of the country's commitments under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity to facilitate reporting and the transfer of biodiversity and conservation-related information both nationally and internationally.



Abdul Latif

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Asam batu or *Begonia herveyana*.



Merawan Kanching or *Hopea subalata*

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Above: White Meranti.

Left: Keruing layang or *Dipterocarpus Sarawakensis*.