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Dr Xavier (centre) being briefed by Forest Research Institute Malaysia Officer Dr Ang Lai Hoe (left) at the Paya Indah Wetlands. Also present were Washizawa (third from right) and Aeon Executive Director Poh Ying Loo (right).

60,000 trees handed over

DENGKIL: The first Malaysia-Japan Friendship Forest – planted with over 60,000 trees across 26ha in Paya Indah Wetlands – has been handed over to the Wildlife and National Parks Department (Perhilitan).

The park was started by Aeon Co (M) Bhd in 2004, which then saw 3,000 volunteers, including children, civil servants and the retail chain's business partners, planting 30,000 trees. That number has since doubled, according to the Star.

In his speech, Aeon Managing Director Shinobu Washizawa said it had been working hard to make sure that the forested area – now called Bukit Aeon – would provide a sustainable living environment in the wetlands park.

"The Malaysia-Japan Friendship Forest project is one of Aeon's most successful green projects," said Shinobu.

He added that he was optimistic that it would be well-managed by the department.

Aeon Malaysia, he said, had planted over 500,000 trees to date, with the Hometown Forest Programme first launched at its Melaka mall in 1991.

The trees comprise several local species

such as mahang, bruas, kekabu and saga.

Water, Land and Natural Resources Minister Dr Xavier Jeyakumar, who witnessed the handover to Perhilitan Director-General Datuk Abdul Kadir Abu Hashim, praised Aeon's corporate social responsibility initiative.

Twenty years ago, Paya Indah Wetlands was a disused mining pool, he said.

Today, it is a habitat for 230 bird species, 220 plant species, 14 fish species, 63 mammals, 20 reptiles and 10 amphibian species, he pointed out.

Dr Xavier said it was also an exsitu conservation area for wildlife such as the blue peacock, otters, porcupines, tortoises and even hippopotami.

"Awareness about the importance of conserving wetlands is rising because these areas are barriers in case of floods, acting as sponges and absorbing more water compared to other soils," he said.

These wetlands were also vital as water retention areas for Putrajaya, Cyberjaya and Kuala Langat, with the potential of becoming recreational and eco-tourism destinations, he added.