

Remote forest mission

UPM sends expedition to Long Moh in search of seedlings for reforestation programme



Handle with care: Precious little 'Selangan Batu' or scientifically known as 'Shorea Superba' seed

Dateline: Bintulu

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LONG Moh, a remote settlement located near the Sarawak-East Kalimantan border, has attracted a local university to explore its eco-tourism and biodiversity potentials.

Universiti Putra Malaysia, Bintulu campus recently sent a 12-member team comprising lecturers, tutor and laboratory staff on a five-day preliminary study cum outreach programme.

The team was led by Zamri Rosli, head of the Forestry Science Department, Faculty of Agriculture and Food Science.

Their mission was to locate trees that still produce healthy seeds and seedlings which could be used in the university's reforestation programme and identify suitable sites for research.

"It's a win-win programme benefiting both parties," said Zamri.

He added that UPM would buy seedlings from the Long Moh community and educate them on the proper and sustainable forest management.

"It's getting harder to find dip-

terocarp forest that was not logged or not within logging concession zones these days apart from the national parks," said Dr Seca Gandaseca, one of the experts on the expedition.

A few years ago, UPM sourced seedlings used in its reforestation programme in collaboration with Japanese multinational Mitsubishi Corporation from forests near Bintulu, like in Ulu Sebauh, Segan, Samarakan and Tatau.

"But to find adult trees that produce healthy seeds in these places is getting more difficult, as most have been cut down," Dr Seca said.

During the expedition, the team collected more than 1,500 Selangan Batu (*Shorea Superba*) although they were hoping to find more tree species.

"Even in far-flung places like Long Moh, it is still difficult to find many species of trees," said Dr Gandaseca, pointing to the magnitude of the problem the state was facing if no serious efforts were taken by all parties to tackle the problem.

He said several logging companies had approached UPM for seeds for their reforestation projects, only to be told that seedlings sourced from a rehabilitated



Group photo: The UPM team posing with longhouse folk involved in extracting seedlings from the forest near Long Moh.

forest were of lesser quality compared to those growing healthily within their concession zone.

However, he said, it was not too late for these companies to allocate certain areas within their concession zone as a "seed bank" area.

Zamri was confident of Long Moh's potential as a biodiversity and wildlife conservation area.

He said although there were traces of logging activities in the surrounding areas, the forest might still be rich in biodiversity not found anywhere else.

"Its remoteness and sparse population form a natural protection," he said.

What the university hopes to

do, according to Zamri, is to teach the locals about forest conservation.

He said the eco-system along the Moh river was still thriving and healthy, a sign that it was still capable of supporting lives in the areas.

"What we need to do is to educate the local communities on how to protect and preserve the forest surrounding them."

Baram MP and International Trade and Industry Deputy Minister Datuk Jacob Dungau Sagan was very supportive of the initiatives taken by the university.

Through his personal aide Albert Jalong Kiriew, Jacob donated RM5,000 to kick-start the pro-

gramme, which would involve setting up a forest nursery at Long Moh.

The Forestry Science Department has also forwarded a request for grant to enable the university to do an in-depth, multi-disciplinary studies in the areas.

The first project being mooted was to explore Long Moh eco-tourism and forest conservation education potential.

"As people whose lives revolve around forest, just like the Penan, the Kenyah Lepu Tau, Lepu Linau, Lepu Ungkau and Lepu Jangan at Long Moh need the forest to sustain their way of life," said Dr Seca.

"Unlike those in towns and cit-

ies, these villagers' supermarket is the jungle.

"It provides them with everything they need in their daily life, from fish in the river to wild games and herbs in the jungle to keep them healthy.

"These are the natural resources that keep them alive and thriving for years.

"Destroying this fragile eco-system would eventually lead to annihilation of the people's way of life and heritage," he stressed.

Zamri said UPM Bintulu's collaboration with Long Moh community is a long term programme and would be expanded in future.

"We might invite other faculties to do research here," he said.



Careful extraction: Zamri pulling out a Selangan Batu seedling from the ground near Long Moh.



Back-breaking: Navigating the rocky Moh River can sometimes involve the removal of boulders as big as the boat itself.



rooting a healthy seedling.



Green: Healthy dipterocarp trees found in Long Moh.



Long Moh: This remote village in upper Baram is located less than 100km from



Long Moh style: The UPM team being greeted with a traditional lunch of fresh fish, jungle ferns and shoots upon their arrival at the 86-door Kenyah longhouse.



Handling with care: The precious selangan batu plant is known scientifically as *Shorea superba*.



New-found buddies: Dr Gandaseca posing with Long Moh headman Bilong Tingang on their way up the Moh River.