

NEWS

Traders want more

PASAR malam traders under the jurisdiction of the Ampang Jaya Municipal Council (MPAJ) are relieved by the cancellation of the RM50 registration fee, but to them, this is not enough. The traders had also hoped that the rubbish collection fee would be maintained at RM2 per day and that they would be allowed to do business at all night markets under the council's jurisdiction with one licence. >11

EVENTS



Out to party

MALAYSIA Airlines crew members dressed to the theme of "Bold and Beautiful" let their hair down for an evening of celebration and merriment at the Bold & Beautiful Stars of Temptations 2009 Awards Night held at Modesto's in CapSquare, Kuala Lumpur, recently. >21

FEATURE



Discarded treasures

WHAT others consider to be rubbish, is sometimes seen as a treasure to M. Anand. The retired civil servant who is now a prominent landscape designer, uses unwanted items and transforms them into charming features for his home which is surrounded by a Balinese-inspired garden. >29

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Natural sanctuary for Temuan folk

Orang asli visit regularly to bathe, fish, trek and hold family gatherings

By JADE CHAN
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KAMPUNG Rasau Ulu tok batin (community leader) Erak Sarik has fond memories of the Ayer Hitam Forest Reserve in Puchong, Selangor.

The 59-year-old recalled many of his explorations in the forest, including a time he discovered a panther's footprints there.

"I first entered the forest when I was six with my father and uncle. I once come across three *toyols* (baby-like ghouls) in the forest, but they merely laughed and disappeared after I asked them where their parents were," Erak said.

"I also cried for hours while sitting on a tree-top when I got left behind in the forest as a child," he added.

According to Erak, whose knowledge of the forest and guidance is often sought, the Temuan orang asli tribesmen from his village and nearby Kampung Rasau Hilir visit the forest at least once a month, as the forest is part of their lives.

"We bathe, fish, trek, and hold family gatherings there," Erak said.

The Ayer Hitam Forest is believed to have been settled by the Temuan orang asli tribe 400 years ago.

The entrance to the forest is from Bandar Saujana Puchong, just 10 minutes away from the heart of the Puchong township and a short distance from the Puchong Selatan toll plaza off the LDP Highway.

The forest, under the jurisdiction of the Selangor Forestry Department, is on an 80-year lease since 1996 to Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM).

"As the forest caretaker, we have been granted the right to use it for education, research and extension (activities related to the forest) purposes," UPM Forestry Faculty dean Prof Dr Awang Noor Abd Ghani said.

"The forest's land area was originally 4,270.7ha, but it was degazetted for a variety of



Taking to the sky: Some of the birds that make Ayer Hitam their home.

land uses. As of February 2009, 1,217ha has been gazetted by the Selangor government as an education and research forest," Awang said.

The forest is used for various academic activities and serves as a practical training ground for courses related to ecology, forest management, silviculture, soil science, land survey, and related topics.

"First-year students from our faculty get acquainted with the forest through forestry camps, while the local and international students and researchers carry out research projects in the forest," Awang said.

"UPM staff members and students from

other faculties can also use the forest for training, seminars and workshop purposes," he said.

Awang said the forest was also used as a guided recreation venue for school groups and organisations interested in nature.

According to Awang, beyond education and research, the forest provided other services such as soil protection, watershed protection, microclimate regulation, air pollution control, noise pollution control, shoreline stabilisation (erosion control), sediment retention, carbon sequestration, security and genetic conservation areas.

He said the forest reserve was rich with flora



Insider knowledge: Erak (right) explaining to Dr Awang Noor the difference between some of the plants and their medical properties.



Rich heritage: The Ayer Hitam Forest Forest in Puchong is believed to have been settled by the Temuan orang asli tribe 400 years ago.

and fauna, with its flora biodiversity ranging from timber and fruit trees to algae and ferns, to palm and bamboo, and medical herbs.

Creatures that have been discovered in the forest include primates, wild boar, deer, birds, snakes, frogs, fish and insects.

"Our researchers have discovered some plant and insect species that are endemic (found naturally) in that forest," Awang said.

Awang said based on a study published in 2007, he estimated that the conservation value of the forest was worth RM2.4bil.

"However, if the forest is converted to residential land, the net loss to society would be RM1.3bil," he said.

"In any economic development, we have to take the value of forest goods and services into account. On the subject of social costs, we have to consider the impact on the present and future generations," he said.

While acknowledging that development was essential, Awang said equity issues had to be factored in.

"Who gets what? Who benefits? Who will pay for the loss of resources? If we have to pay, who is willing to pay and how much?"

"The payment mechanism can be charged through the market, depending on the type of goods and services. One example is to use taxpayers' money to maintain and conserve the forest," he said.

Awang said what was needed to be done for the forest was an environmental impact assessment (EIA) on the physical, social and economic aspects.

"We need to study the impact on the local community in terms of risk aspects like landslides and pollution.

"The extended cost benefit analysis needs to take into account all the direct and indirect impact in the cash flow," he said.

"The forest environmental cost and benefits should be included, and not just its market value," Awang said.

He also suggested that the forest be jointly managed by getting the community to support the preservation of the forest and consider it a part of the public property.

For more information on the Ayer Hitam Forest Reserve, visit www.forr.upm.edu.my. Those wishing to organise activities in the forest can contact forest conservator Paimon Bawon at 03-8943 7162/ 7219 or paiman@putra.upm.edu.my.