

21/02/1997

Greening the country with three million trees by year 2000

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Three million trees will be planted by the year 2000 under a nation-greening campaign to be launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on March 3.

The ceremony at the Medan Idaman Recreational Park in Gombak will kick off State and district-level launches throughout the country on the same day.

"Senior officers such as Chief Ministers and Datuk Bandars will be at each respective launch to symbolise the Government's commitment to the campaign," Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh said today after attending the ministry's Chinese New Year and Hari Raya celebrations.

"Thirty-three trees will be planted during each ceremony to commemorate the date of the launch," he added.

The campaign, jointly organised by the ministry and Kuala Lumpur City Hall, will encompass other tree-planting programmes such as the one managed by the Malaysian Nature Society that Dr Mahathir launched in April last year.

When contacted, the ministry's Landscape Department director-general Ismail Ngah said while the MNS-managed campaign was also a nationwide effort, next month's campaign was a government initiative that was seen to be bigger and more comprehensive.

Ting said although 72 per cent of Malaysia's land area was still covered by greenery, the campaign was being organised in line with Dr Mahathir's vision of a garden nation.

"The ministry will launch a national publicity campaign to appeal to all agencies, including private companies, schools, members of the public and non-governmental organisations, to take part.

"We need about 15 per cent of the population, or three out of every 20 people, to plant a tree to meet our target.

"In the long term, we hope to have 20 million trees planted by the year 2020," Ting said.

He said the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia had decided what kind of trees would be planted, including fast-growing trees such as the sentang (*Azadirachta Excelsa*), the kelumpang (*Sterculia Foetida*) and the pulai (*Alstonia Augustiloba*).

Others include the merawan siput jantan (*Hopea Odarata*), the janda merana (*Salix Babylonica*), the simpuh (*Dillinia Indica*), the jambu laut (*Eugenia Grandis*), the tecoma (*Tabebuia Pentaphylla*), the kayu manis (*Cinnamomum Iners*) and the kasai (*Pometia Pinnata*).

"The trees will not necessarily be ones that are indigenous to Malaysia. They may also come from other countries, but must be able to adapt to our environment."

He said the public would be encouraged to plant the trees in areas such as public parks, riverbanks, near beaches, on government land along roads and in housing estates.

Tree saplings can be bought from FRIM or by contacting the ministry's newly-formed Landscape Department, which will also oversee the campaign.

"The cost of the tree sapling will vary, but the average price will be RM4 or RM5."

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