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Opportunities for wetlands research

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The Wetlands Sanctuary Project in Kuala Langat aims to provide opportunities for local and international groups in conservation, research, recreational and educational efforts.

Malaysian Wetlands Foundation chief executive officer Muralee Menon said the project's design, presented to the foundation's chairman Tan Sri Abdul Halim Ali today, was already 80 per cent complete.

The plan is designed by 52 consultants, including architects and engineers as well as educational, eco-tourism and information technology experts, in a workshop which began on June 9.

Targeted for completion by Aug 11, it will be presented to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in mid-August.

Menon said the 5,000ha sanctuary's artificial physical structures would be erected in phases.

"The first phase, including a visitors' centre, forest interpretation centre, training resort facilities, restaurant and wetland sewage treatment ponds, is due to be completed and launched by the Prime Minister in September 1998," he said.

However, Menon added, the buildings would be "light structures" as opposed to "heavy brick and mortar" ones.

About half the area would remain a no-access zone for about three years, he said, adding that they would postpone the building of any recreational chalets until the effects on the environment could be better understood.

Menon said the sanctuary's location next to the Multimedia Super Corridor also opened up opportunities for it to contribute to the information age.

"In fact, we are even discussing possibilities of submitting a proposal for an additional Flagship Application on Environment Technology," he said.

The foundation hoped to work with Malaysian and international universities on developing comprehensive and practical postgraduate programmes in environmental studies.

"We are looking into scholarship and academic credit programmes for secondary, pre-university and university students doing research or volunteering at the sanctuary.

"We are also discussing programmes geared towards schoolchildren and youth groups like the Rakan Muda spin-offs and Yayasan Salam," he said.

Menon said the foundation and the consultants were looking at projects in the Netherlands and Australia as well as programmes like Operation Raleigh, in developing their ideas.

"Later, we will also be looking at bringing people from African and South countries here for training," he said, adding that the concept of a wetlands sanctuary could be adapted to local needs."

A website for the sanctuary would be launched within two weeks.

The foundation was also considering a logo competition.

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