

28/02/1998

Approved: RM68m plan for wetlands sanctuary

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has approved a RM68 million master plan for the rehabilitation and development of Paya Indah, the Malaysian Wetland Sanctuary in Kuala Langat, Selangor.

Malaysian Wetlands Foundation chief executive officer Muralee Menon said today the approval was given yesterday during a special briefing on the latest developments of the project.

Also present at the briefing were Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Abu Hassan Omar, MWF chairman Tan Sri Abdul Halim Ali, foundation member Tan Sri Razali Ismail and Selangor State Secretary Datuk Hashim Meon.

"Most of the funding will come from the private sector but the foundation is also looking into other possibilities such as the issuing of green bonds or even public donations," he said.

Muralee said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim had also agreed that the National Heritage Fund be used to fund the project for the first five years.

Despite the current economic problems, he said the project would still go on and the commitment shown by the backers was as strong as before.

Muralee said he was convinced that the project would give good returns on investment due to its uniqueness and also location near the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang.

Furthermore, the sanctuary would also bring economic spin-offs to neighbouring areas.

"However, we will have to market it properly and aggressively. Professionals will be engaged for promotional programmes and to put together packages."

He said the foundation would now concentrate on getting the place ready in time for visiting heads of state during the Commonwealth Games.

"We will have to get the information centre, administrative centre and restaurant as well as rehabilitation and landscaping work done by then," he said.

Leaders from Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation countries meeting in Kuala Lumpur in November will also tour the sanctuary.

Muralee said Dr Mahathir, while happy with the proposals in the master plan, gave several suggestions to further improve the plan.

"The Prime Minister made some suggestions about landscaping and also the type of trees which we could plant in the area. He said for transportation, horse carriages could be used, while the boats should use electric outboard motors."

He also said the foundation was looking into working with Tenaga Nasional Berhad so that its electric vehicles could be used for internal transport within the sanctuary.

Organised groups will be allowed once or twice a month from April so that they could gain an understanding of the project.

"The doors of the sanctuary will be opened to the public by January next year," Muralee said.

He said the foundation would have to begin looking into funding, management of commercial concerns within the sanctuary and recruitment of guides.

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