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Greenery, wildlife slowly returning to Paya Indah

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Restoration and landscaping work at Paya Indah, the Malaysian Wetlands Sanctuary, is going on at full swing as the scars of previous sand and clay-mining slowly heal with the return of greenery and wildlife.

While a few piles of peat from sand and clay-mining can still be seen, the Malaysian Wetlands Foundation which is responsible for the project has managed to carry out extensive restoration earthworks to relocate the excavated peat and strengthen the edges of the lakes within the sanctuary.

A visit to the site, which now has improved security arrangements, by the New Straits Times showed the original mess created by sand and clay mining has almost been completely cleaned up.

Most of the scrap metal abandoned by miners have been removed while water flow which was disrupted by mining has been rectified with newly-dug trenches.

Last year, sand and claymining and illegal farming were discovered within the sanctuary's boundaries despite repeated pledges of protection from the Selangor Government.

In October, Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Abu Hassan Omar ordered a shutdown of all mining and farming activities in the sanctuary, directing the Kuala Langat district land office to crack down on the activities and continuously monitor the area.

Currently, landscaping work is in progress, with lakeside slopes being strengthened and covered with a layer of peat for topsoil. Grass was also being planted on these slopes.

Several excavators were being used to remove salvinia molesta which has infested several lakes. A water fern of low wildlife utilisation value, the salvinia is later transported to a suitable site for composting.

Lotus and lillies with their pretty pink and white blooms, together with reeds and grass have started growing in the lakes, providing the perfect feeding ground and resting place for the purple heron and the purple swamphen.

More of these birds, together with other species, have gradually returned to these lakes now that the miners have gone.

An experimental broadwalk, made of mangrove poles from the Matang forest in Perak and treated against the weather and termites, has almost been completed after two months of construction.

A network of dirt paths around the sanctuary linking the various lakes and workplaces has now been levelled, and a ride within the place, while still bumpy, is now more bearable.

These paths would become the future routes for non-motorised vehicles within the sanctuary.

When completed, the sanctuary would contain a visitors' centre and several other facilities where every aspect of wetlands conservation and rehabilitation studies would be done.

The Paya Indah wetland sanctuary was mooted as Malaysia's showcase for environmentally-sound development, restoration and conservation methods, and to be a green lung in the heart of a rapidly developing area which includes the neighbouring Multimedia Super Corridor.

Today, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was given a special briefing on the latest developments on the project. The briefing was given by a team of wetland officers led by chairman of the foundation, Tan Sri

Abdul Halim Ali, who is also Chief Secretary to the Government.

Also present were Abu Hassan, foundation member Tan Sri Razali Ismail, Selangor State Secretary Datuk Hashim Meon, foundation chief executive officer Muralee Menon.

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