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## Paya Indah Wetlands to open on Saturday

DENGGKIL, Sat. - The long-awaited opening of the Paya Indah Wetlands here next Saturday will be a testimony to the benefits of environmental rehabilitation and conservation.

The wetlands used to be tin and clay mining land.

Illegal logging from the surrounding peat swamp forest had destroyed its natural environment.

Rehabilitation work began in late 1996 with the aim of turning the area into an eco-tourism attraction.

Paya Indah Wetlands chief executive officer Muralee Menon said the Selangor Government's original plan for the area was for a mixed development project.

"The wetland is proof that you don't always have to build housing projects over ex-mining land," Muralee said during a media tour of site today.

Today, one will be struck by the tranquility of the sweeping landscape and the soothing effect of the water.

After more than a year's delay, the wetlands will be launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Oct 13.

Paya Indah's total land area is 3,100 hectares and it includes a network of 14 lakes.

Of this, about 450ha will be developed in phases as a park.

About 200ha will first be opened to the public on Oct 14.

Visitors can rent bicycles (at RM3 each per day), take electric tram rides, electric buggies or horse-drawn carts around the park.

Attractions include a palm garden with many species, a lookout tower, a Malay kampung house, boat rides and fishing.

Four Nile hippopotami which were flown from Botswana recently will also be featured. The wetland is also home to 213 bird species.

Guided tours are available, but the do-it-yourself types can explore with the help of a guidebook to point out interesting bird and plant species.

Visitors can experience walking through a simulated peat swamp forest at the Exploration Centre, which also highlights wetland flora and fauna and the importance of wetlands in supplying water.

Future attractions include a tin mining museum in a disused tin dredge and chalet facilities.

Entry fees on weekdays is RM5 and RM7 on weekends.

Paya Indah is accessible through Dengkil from the Elite, Damansara-Puchong and Seremban highways.

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