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Three Nile hippos released into Paya Indah Wetlands

DENKIL, Fri. - Three of the four Nile Hippopotami flown here from Botswana were released from quarantine this evening into their new home at the Paya Indah Wetlands.

The last hippo, the largest of the four, will be released tomorrow. Cautiously, the first hippopotamus peeped out from behind the door of its quarantine building at 4.10pm today.

Startled by the presence of workers, journalists and photographers who had gathered to watch their release, the hippo ran along the wall of the enclosure before heading into the lake for a dip.

The hippos' home is a 1.2 hectare lake with a depth of about five metres. The area is enclosed by a low wall with electric wiring as hippos are able to climb low obstacles.

It was not easy coaxing the hippos out at first. Paya Indah staff climbed up ladders and stood on the wall spraying them with jets of water and making noises to chase them out of the quarantine building.

No one was allowed inside the enclosure as agitated hippos are likely to charge and bite.

The hippos arrived here on Sept 26 after a 27-hour flight from Gaborone, Botswana's capital in a Royal Malaysian Air Force C130H aircraft. Their translocation marks the first time wild hippopotami have been air-freighted for such a great distance and on board a military plane.

The Paya Indah Wetlands will be launched tomorrow by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. His wife, Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali will also launch the New Straits Times-in-Education (NIE) Young Photographers' Workshop.

Thirty schoolchildren will participate in the launch tomorrow. The workshop will be held on Nov 3.

A pilot programme between NIE and Paya Indah Wetlands, the workshop is aimed at promoting awareness of the importance of conserving the wetlands' natural environment.

The 10 to 12 year-old students will also be taught basic photography by renowned photographer Eric Peris. Their works will be exhibited later.

Fujifilm will be providing cameras and films. Transport and meals will also be provided.

Peris will also put up a gallery of his works on flora and fauna as well as the wonders of the wetlands.

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