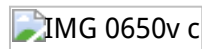


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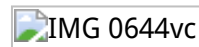
English News

20 OCT USM PUSHES FOR MERBOK MANGROVES TO BE GAZETTED AS A UNESCO BIOSPHERE RESERVE



PENANG, 19 Oct. 2015 – A team of researchers from Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) is actively preparing a dossier for the Merbok Mangrove Forest in Kedah to be gazetted as a UNESCO (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) Biosphere Reserve.

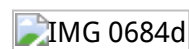
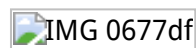
Throughout the research done by USM for more than four decades, the Merbok Mangrove Forest has proven to be a unique site, including being the home to the highest number of mangrove varieties in the world, all within a small area of 4,000 hectares.



The proposal to gazette the 'valuable' site, with the assistance of the Kedah State government, is now in its final stage of data updating and compilation. The completed dossier is expected to be ready for submission to UNESCO the latest by January next year.

The project led by the Director of Centre for Research Initiative (CRI) on Biological Sciences, Professor Dr. Siti Azizah Mohd. Nor is seen as complementing the tourism packages for the state of Kedah, which is also where the Kedah Tua civilisation has been successfully established, accomplished by yet another well-known USM archaeologist, Professor Dato' Dr. Mokhtar Saidin.

Mokhtar, who was responsible for locating the archaeological site of Bukit Bunuh, Lenggong as one of man's early civilisation sites, and to be included into the UNESCO World Heritage list would also be involved in the preparation of the said dossier.

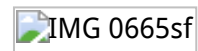
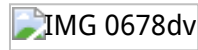


Siti Azizah said, there are more than 32 species of mangroves at Merbok, and among those which are endangered are the species of 'berus mata buaya' (*Bruiguiera hainseii*), 'gedabu' (*Sonneratia ovata*), and 'berembang' (*Sonneratia caseolaris*).

“The time has come for this area to be gazetted, or else the country would be faced with a truly huge loss from the destruction of the mangrove forest.

“Our research team has also lined-up strategic short and long-term plans for the preservation of this area, including in becoming an area for sustainable eco-tourism,” she said.

She was interviewed after a special briefing at the meeting of the Central Committee on Gazetting the Merbok River Mangrove Forest as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve here recently. The meeting was chaired by the Kedah Mentri Besar, Dato’ Seri Mukhriz Mahathir.

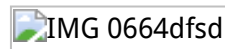


Mukhriz meanwhile announced that, the state government would provide full support for the area to become sustainable, as well as in giving commitment to raise the socio-economic standards of the local communities.

He also said, his office was very satisfied with the report on the progress of gazetting the Merbok Mangrove Forest and regarded the study done by USM to be beneficial and would bring a significant impact to the development of the state of Kedah.

Siti Azizah also said, the move to gazette the Merbok mangroves too would thrust the research findings of local scientists further, including those on Bujang Valley and Merbok River, onto the international stage .

When commenting on the uniqueness of the mega-biodiversity which are available there, she said, the Merbok mangroves too presented a very good ecosystem, providing sustenance to the fauna, other than being a buffer zone for the tsunami and erosion.



She also stated that, the mangrove trees are able to naturally become hot weather regulators (global warming), and nursery for prawns and crabs among others.

“Currently, the conditions are becoming more threatening for the Merbok mangrove forest and proactive steps need to be taken immediately and gazetting it as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve would be the best step to ensure the preservation of this natural and priceless ‘treasure’.

“Once gazetted, this area will undergo a conservation process involving sustainable development, community involvement and scientific approaches to allow the area to be properly maintained and become an eco-tourism attraction,” she said.

She added, other benefits would be to allow Kedah to be the location for mangrove biodiversity, the Merbok mangroves existing as an international living laboratory and to raise the socio-economic standards of the local communities.

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