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JOHOR BARU: While most of us live our lives following familiar routines, life unfolds quite differently for the communities in Kampung Ayer Pasir, Melaka and Pulau Tanjung Surat near Pengerang, Johor.

Many of the people in these communities are retirees or those engaged in local village work, alongside single mothers and fishermen. Despite their daily struggles to make ends meet, they remain deeply aware of the environmental challenges surrounding their homes.

Amran Haron, 59, the former head of Kampung Ayer Pasir, is well aware of the illegal encroachment into the area surrounding the Durian Tunggal Dam.

"Years of encroachment by irresponsible parties planting various vegetation, including palm trees, have impacted the dam.

"The reservoir supplies 60% of Melaka's water needs, and we are concerned that continued encroachment could threaten this vital water source," he explained.

Meanwhile, according to Persatuan Sahabat Hutan Bakau Pulau Tanjung Surat (PSHBPTS) chairman Badariah Ayob, 50, the association was established in 2018 when its pioneer leaders noticed the worsening conditions of several degraded areas on the island.

However, they faced several challenges in building and managing the organisation, including a lack of support from the community and local authorities.

"When we first set up the association to plant mangrove trees, some of the villagers found the idea hard to grasp. They believed there was no reason to do this, as mangroves could thrive on their own.

"Also, during those days, it was so hard to convince external parties to invest or initiate programmes on our island and plant mangrove trees. As newcomers to this initiative, we were often stuck, lacking the experience and leadership to move forward," she said.

Ray of hope from PETRONAS

Since 2021, PETRONAS, through its Yayasan PETRONAS Walk4Trees programme and Pengerang Integrated Complex (PIC), has collaborated in a Mangrove Conservation programme, successfully planting 39,800 mangrove trees in Pulau Tanjung Surat.

Additionally, under the Walk4Trees programme, 3,200 trees were planted at Durian Tunggal Dam and surrounding areas in Melaka.

"We would not have achieved this milestone without the full support of PETRONAS and Yayasan PETRONAS. To equip ourselves for this programme, we gathered for community peer learning forums and a site visit in Kuala Selangor," Badariah explained.

Sharing the same narrative, Amran shared his experience as the first responder to local authorities, such as Badan Kawal Selia Air (BKSA) Melaka, in monitoring and executing proper measures to ensure the preservation of the trees.

PETRONAS DRIVES ENVIRONMENTAL CARE IN SOUTHERN REGION



The villagers of Pulau Tanjung Surat, Johor inspecting the mangrove trees on the island. They have been working with various organisations, including PETRONAS, to secure the future of these trees.—THOMAS YONG/ The Star.



Crabs, shells and fish are thriving in the mangrove areas, benefitting villagers who depend heavily on the sea to make a living.

"Now, we serve as representatives to BKSA in ensuring that the planting area stays preserved," he said.

"Also, through the support of Yayasan PETRONAS and GEC (Global Environment Centre), we managed to plant around 3,200 forest trees of various species under the Walk4Trees programme. This is to help regenerate water at the dam, and we've already seen improvements."

He added that, through GEC as the implementation partner, participating villagers have learnt how to cultivate and nurture various types of trees through hands-on training and knowledge-sharing sessions.

The villagers were guided on proper planting techniques, soil preparation and sustainable tree maintenance practices to ensure the long-term health and viability of the planted trees.

The training also emphasised the importance of sustainable practices, such as ongoing care for the trees, preventing deforestation and monitoring growth to ensure long-term environmental impact.

Impacting livelihoods

For Badariah, planting mangrove trees has benefitted the villagers in more ways than one – it has helped improve the socio-economic conditions of the PSHBPTS' members, many of whom are from lower-income groups.

"Most of our members do not have a fixed or steady income. They previously relied on catching crabs and collecting shells to make ends meet," she added.

"However, since having these programmes, our members are able to make good profits, and through their monthly income, they are able to look after their families."

Badariah said this has partly aided in their children's education. She was able to send her daughter for a degree in marine biology at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS).

"Planting mangrove trees in Pulau Tanjung Surat has also helped revitalise the environment, allowing us to witness firsthand the return of marine life to the island," she pointed out.

Badariah said crabs, various shells, and even fish can be found in abundance in the mangrove areas within and around the island.

The presence of such marine life-forms has benefitted the villagers who depend heavily on the sea to make a living, she added.

While Pulau Tanjung Surat's biodiversity in the water is thriving, the number of trees surrounding Durian Tunggal Dam have also shown significant growth.

"It is great to see various animals hovering and returning to their habitat. It's good for our environment", Amran concluded.

Striving to elevate awareness

According to Badariah, there are about 17 species of mangrove trees, and Pulau Tanjung Surat is home to nine of them.

"These trees are thriving in seven ponds and in our island nursery, thanks to the dedication and hard work of our members," she said.

Badariah said PSHBPTS is working closely with the state Forestry Department and other NGOs, including those outside Johor, to plant mangrove trees in the country, supplying saplings and seeds to other states including Perak, Selangor and Penang.

She added that this effort contributed to the government's target of planting 100 million trees, which was completed in December 2024.

"Our contribution may be small, but we hope it will create a lasting impact and raise awareness about the importance of taking care of our environment," she concluded.

Moreover, participants were encouraged to view tree planting not only as an environmental effort, but also to improve community well-being and resilience.

Amran reflected on the broader purpose of their efforts, noting that while planting trees may seem like a small act, its impact extends far beyond the village.

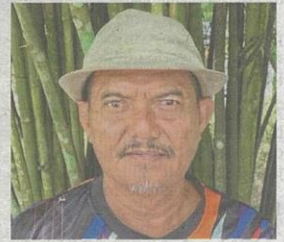
"What we're doing here is just one part of a much bigger goal," he said, emphasising that every tree planted contributes to restoring balance to the ecosystem and safeguarding vital resources for future generations.

For the villagers, the initiative is not only about environmental conservation but also about creating a meaningful legacy that underscores the importance of collective responsibility.

Amran also added that community awareness is the key to steering discipline, enabling them to work together as a team while adhering to their planting schedule, driving their sense of



Badariah is glad that efforts to plant mangrove trees are paying off multi-fold.



Amran hopes the next generation will carry on planting trees to safeguard the dam's future.

duty to protect the environment. That said, he also expressed hope that the younger generation in the village would carry on this initiative to not only safeguard the dam's future but also contribute to a healthier ecosystem.

Rooted in purpose

In addition to the Walk4Trees programme, Yayasan PETRONAS spearheads other impactful initiatives such as the One Million Trees (OMT), set to begin this year with a target of planting 100,000 trees in the southern region of Peninsular Malaysia.

Other than PIC, PETRONAS Gas Berhad (PGB) has also committed to biodiversity and conservation programmes, which seek to maintain the essential ecosystem for present and future generations, via the Program Sayangi Sungai Latoh, a five-year environmental conservation initiative in collaboration with Malaysian Nature Society (MNS).

The partnership has seen 9,625 mangrove seedlings planted as part of preservation efforts in Johor from 2021 to 2023.

Beyond reforestation, these programmes foster community involvement and instil a shared responsibility for environmental conservation.

It encourages resilience, unity and awareness of biodiversity preservation – values that align with PETRONAS' 50th anniversary theme, "Continuing a legacy together, for our future."

These efforts also reflect PETRONAS' aspirations in achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, guided by its Energy Transition Strategy.

Aligned with the company's Sustainability Approach, these initiatives emphasise Fostering a Just Transition and Thriving with Nature – both key pillars that resonate with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals 2030.