

# Muddy boots, mangroves and keeping nature alive

By **ARNOLD LOH**  
arnold.loh@thestar.com.my

**BALIK PULAU:** It might have felt icky at first but once they got used to the mud, they could focus on the task of getting all 6,490 mangrove tree seedlings planted before the high tide rolled in.

"My feet were deep inside the mud, so after just a few minutes of plodding through it, I found it tiring.

"But it is a fun mission to work together and get all the seedlings planted," said Zhang Xinyue, 20, from Henan, China, who is in her final year as a communication undergraduate at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM).

Campus mate Alya Mohd Razula, 22, said she was delighted to discover that up close, the mangrove forest was teeming with life.

"So many crabs everywhere. It makes me realise how vital coastal mangrove forests are to the marine ecology," said Alya, a



**Under the boardwalk:** Volunteers harvesting seedlings to plant in the mangrove forest in Balik Pulau. — LIM BENG TATT/The Star

final-year mathematical sciences undergraduate at USM.

Architecture undergraduate K. Kavishene, 22, thought that with about 260 volunteers planting 6,490 seedlings, each person only needed to plant around 25 for the job to be done.

She soon realised it was easier

said than done.

"It takes only a minute to make a hole in the mud and stick a seedling into it, but we have to walk slowly to avoid falling flat on the mud. We have to go deeper to find bare patches so the whole forest stays densely filled with trees.

"Then we keep returning to the

boardwalk to get more seedlings after running out and they're heavy when you carry many at once," she said, adding that despite the labour, it was satisfying to help keep a mangrove forest alive.

The volunteers were working in a coastal mangrove forest beside Sungai Burung here, a narrow swath measuring almost 1,000ha along the western coastline of Penang island.

The seedlings planted form part of a global target of 100,000 mangrove and native trees planted under an environmental campaign called Trip 4 Trees.

Programme manager Paraamjit Singh said the campaign's aim was to raise awareness on the effect of deforestation and climate change while encouraging community-based replanting exercises.

"So far, more than 52,000 seedlings have already been sponsored and accounted for, and today's planting brings us closer

to our global target," he said.

He said the campaign would culminate in an overland journey from Malaysia to the United Kingdom next year, covering 27,000km across 18 countries.

The journey will be undertaken in three classic air-cooled Volkswagen vehicles driven by Malaysians M. Jeyakumaaran, Muhammad Syahmi Abdullah and Muhammad Danish Vijay.

"Along the way, we will work with communities to distribute seedlings, promote climate action awareness and share Malaysia's replanting efforts with an international audience," Paraamjit said.

He added that while the journey would draw attention to the campaign, activities like the mangrove planting in Balik Pulau remained its core.

"This is where the real work happens, with volunteers getting their feet dirty and understanding why these ecosystems matter," he said.