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MediaTitle	The Star		
Date	09 Jan 2020	Color	Full Color
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Page No	1,5	Readership	527,958
Language	English	ArticleSize	464 cm ²
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Creating mini forests in cities

Programme part of government's initiative to plant one million trees nationwide

By KALAIVANI MURUGASAN
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SOME 140 trees from 36 species were planted at Bandar Botanic Lake in Klang as part of a forest rehabilitation programme.

Water, Land and Natural Resources Minister Datuk Dr A. Xavier Jayakumar attended the pre-launch of the Restoration, Redemption and Rehabilitation programme in conjunction with International Day of Forests which falls on March 21.

The programme was the first initiative by the ministry and Forestry Department in collaboration with the Forest Research Institute Malaysia and Klang Municipal Council.

Xavier said this is the first programme under his ministry which had pledged to plant one million trees within the next five years.

"There will be an official launch of this programme on March 21 with the aim of beautifying the surroundings with more green areas, especially in water catchment ponds which also act as a form of flood control.

"We are starting to plant trees in several areas to accomplish this mission.

"Today we are also planting 14 *merbau* trees in this lake to promote the national tree that was announced by the Prime Minister on August 23 last year during the 'Hutan Kita' exhibition," he said.

Xavier added that both the local authority and residents should join hands with the ministry to take care of trees planted at the lake.

"We hope this programme will be an example for other upcoming projects.

"I am hoping to create many mini forests in cities with the cooperation of all local authorities in every state.

"These 'forests in the city' will be created in smaller spaces as we do not have sufficient area to create large forests in cities.

"To achieve this, state governments should gazette areas as reserved land to create mini forests," said Xavier.

According to the minister, the government had allocated RM100mil under the 11th Malaysia Plan for the programme, focusing on Peninsular Malaysia.

"We will ask for more allocation under the 12th Malaysia Plan to plant more trees," he said.

On another matter, Xavier said any state that disagreed with the proposed water tariff increase had been asked to submit their mechanism to the ministry to provide treated water to the people.

"This is because the cost of preparing and managing treated water is high and remedial action has to be taken to address the water crisis in several states.

"People need to understand the water industry must have more money so we can have supply 24 hours a day throughout the



Xavier (fourth from left) and Water, Land and Natural Resources Ministry secretary-general Datuk Zurinah Pawanteh (centre, in black top) after planting a merbau tree during the pre-launch of the programme at Bandar Botanic Park in Klang.

year," he said.

Xavier added that only when the ministry had sufficient budget could it provide the infrastructure to manage water operations besides addressing the shortage

of water supply.

The proposed increase under the new water Tariff Setting Mechanism would be between 6sen and 71sen per 1,000 litres.