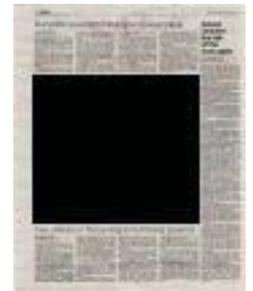


Headline	Mission to conserve forests		
MediaTitle	The Star		
Date	22 Mar 2021	Color	Full Color
Section	Nation	Circulation	175,986
Page No	2	Readership	527,958
Language	English	ArticleSize	429 cm ²
Journalist	By ASHLEY TANG	AdValue	RM 21,590
Frequency	Daily	PR Value	RM 64,770



Mission to conserve forests

PM: Policy aims to weather domestic and global challenges

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PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Forestry Policy aims to provide clear directions for the forestry sector in facing new domestic and international challenges, says Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

Announcing that all states had agreed and adopted the policy during the 78th National Land Council meeting on Jan 29, Muhyiddin said they came together on the field of management of the country's forest, whose policy was now over 120 years old.

"I would like to emphasise that the Malaysian Forestry Policy is our shared policy.

"We must all act and play a more active role as conservation agents and drivers of the country's socio-economic development.

"I hope that the joint efforts of the federal and state government in implementing the five objectives of the Malaysian Forestry Policy will continue to be strong to achieve the desired targets," he said via a live stream on the launch of the Malaysia Forestry Policy in conjunction with the International Day of Forests 2021 at the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) yesterday.

Muhyiddin said as of 2018, the country had 55.3% or 18.27 million hectares of forested area and tree cover - 43.6% in Peninsular Malaysia, 64.5% in Sabah and 62.3% in Sarawak.

This percentage, he pointed out, was higher than most European countries, including France, Germany, Italy and Britain, adding that of the total forested areas in Malaysia, only 1.7% were degraded forest.



Green efforts: Muhyiddin and Energy and Natural Resources Minister Datuk Seri Dr Shamsul Anuar Nasarah watering the Resak trees that he planted in conjunction with the International Day of Forests 2021 at FRIM in Taman Botani Kepong, Kuala Lumpur. — Bernama

Despite this, he said the government was still committed to responsible and sustainable forest management in implementing restoration programmes.

"Since 2016, 1,859ha of degraded forest areas have been restored with an allocation of RM152.82mil.

"This year, the government has provided an allocation of RM34.5mil for the restoration of degraded forests throughout the country.

"I urge state governments to intensify their efforts to restore the degraded forest areas through nature-based solutions, especially in environmentally sensitive areas.

"The cost of maintaining and conserving forest areas in Malaysia is also very huge. According to esti-

mates, a total of RM6bil is needed for this purpose," he said.

As such, he said various specialised financial instruments had been created by the government, including the Ecological Fiscal Transfer for Biodiversity Conservation, National Natural Conservation Trust Fund for Natural Resources and Forest Development Fund Trust Fund under the state governments in Peninsular Malaysia.

However, he said as the existing financial instruments were still insufficient to cover the huge allocation, the Cabinet had approved the setting up of the Malaysia Forest Fund (MFF) last year.

The MFF is expected to bring in funds of US\$100mil (RM410mil)

over the next seven years, which would then be channelled to state governments specifically for conservation efforts, including social forestry that would improve the socio-economic status of the Orang Asli and the local communities.

Muhyiddin hopes that the private sector will also take the opportunity to work together as a strategic partner of MFF towards enhancing collective forest conservation efforts.

He also urged the state governments to step up on their efforts to gazette and maintain forested areas, especially in the Central Forest Spine (CFS) and the Heart of Borneo ecological corridors.

Muhyiddin said in the Fourth National Physical Plan which is being finalised, emphasis would be placed on the CFS to ensure the sustainability of the forest landscape with the establishment of new ecological corridors.

"This approach is able to reduce human and wildlife conflicts as well as enable the free movement of wildlife, especially the country's iconic endangered species.

"If extraordinary actions are not taken now, the country will definitely lose its iconic species, especially the Malayan Tiger forever.

"Therefore, I urge state governments to take action to gazette the Malayan Tiger habitat areas as a permanent forest reserve or wildlife reserve," he said.

Muhyiddin also welcomed the commitment of state governments to increase forest cover under their respective state structure plans, adding that this strategic cooperation of the state government, the Federal Government and the private sector was important in realising set targets.