

Save our wetlands

Star 6/7

WORLD Wetlands Day was celebrated throughout the world on Feb 1. Wetlands are among the world's most productive environments.

They are cradles of biological diversity, providing the water and primary productivity upon which countless species of plants and animals depend for survival. They support high concentrations of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish and invertebrate species.

Wetlands are also important storehouses of plant genetic material. Wetlands themselves strongly influence the hydrology of a catchment area. They have important functions such as water storage, regulation of water quality and climate regulation. When wetlands are modified or destroyed, this can have a serious impact on the water cycle in a catchment area as was evident in Kota Tinggi during the recent floods.

When we look at the distribution of water in the world, we can see that most of the world's water resources (some 94%) is contained in the oceans. Almost 6% is contained in groundwater and ice. This means that less than 1% is available as freshwater. Hence, we must manage it wisely.

Wetlands are often cited as playing an important role in the water cycle. A study on the role of wetlands in the water cycle (Bullock and Acreman, 2003) revealed that this is true but there are some differences between the roles of different types of wetlands.

Most wetlands in floodplains reduce or delay floods. Wetlands also generally increase evaporation and thus reduce the river flow.

Kota Tinggi was one of the worst hit



Mangroves are an integral part of our wetlands.

towns in the recent floods in the country. Are we aware that among the worst hit areas was the new town development area encompassing the new bus station of Kota Tinggi, which only 10 years ago was a mangrove swamp and partly peat swamp?

These two types of wetlands need to be conserved and rehabilitated in Malaysia. Accreditation as Ramsar sites (wetlands of international importance) should be sought by all states in the country in order to protect our vital wetlands. In light of the recent Johor floods, we hope our decision-makers will initiate drastic measures

to ensure that all projects in the Ninth Malaysia Plan adhere to basic environmental policies and requirements, followed by strict enforcement and quality control by all relevant departments and local authorities.

Local authorities must learn from this bitter experience that there is a price for unsustainable development. We must think beyond today. Removing the fragile wetland eco-systems is damaging our nation's rich biodiversity, fragile landscape and legacy.

Should we not punish the people behind such irresponsible development?

Speak up and be heard. If you feel strongly about any issue, let us hear from you. Write, with your name, address and phone number, to:

Write to: Speaking Up, StarTwo, The Star, Menara Star, 15, Jalan 16/11, 46350 Petaling Jaya, Selangor

E-mail: startwo@thestar.com.my

Letters must contain your full name, home/e-mail address and telephone number.

Is greed the cause? Why are procedures and guidelines on the environment not adhered to? What happened to the integrated planning exercises so basic to any town planning exercise and study?

I am utterly disappointed and unhappy at the damage on environment that has affected not only the livelihood of the people but also claimed precious lives.

Should we revise our education syllabus to include restoration of the environment and "eradication of greed"?

Or perhaps all our educators, students and politicians should be given compulsory orientation on the importance of sustaining our environment.

Harban Singh, Johor Baru