

## NEWS



Only *Api-api* trees can be seen along the seashore of Pantai Tin, Perak. Pic by Mohammed Arsyad Md Yasin

# Mangrove clearing leads to floods

**BUFFER ZONE:** The trees reduce the impact of high tides and tsunamis

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**T**HE destruction of mangrove forests along the coastal areas is to be blamed for the recent floods that occurred during the high tide phenomenon in several states.

In fact, the problem had been predicted by environmentalists and green non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which had highlighted the importance of mangrove forests.

The forests act as buffer zones and natural "sponges" that reduce the impact of high tides and tsunamis.

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) field researcher Meor Razak Meor Abdul Rahman said many years ago, the NGOs had raised the issue and had done so again in 2007, when the authorities gave the green light to clear mangrove trees at several areas nationwide.

"For instance, in Pantai Remis, about 70ha of mangrove forest were cleared for a reclamation project," he said.

Checks by the *New Sunday Times*

at several places here confirmed that mangrove trees could hardly be found and only *Api-api* trees, or the *Avicennia* species, could be found.

As for the 70ha reclaimed area, most of it were covered with red soil. Rows of double-storey terrace houses could be seen in the area. Villagers claimed that they were bought by outsiders. There were also shrimp ponds located near the beach.

The remaining vacant land had been marked for development into a new housing area.

"The high tide phenomenon is a normal phenomenon that occurs several times a year.

"However, heavy rain and the lack of buffer zones to absorb water from the sea and rivers will cause floods," said Razak, who claimed that the clearing of the mangroves was the main reason for the recent floods here.

On Tuesday, 76 people from 15 families here were evacuated after the water level rose to 1.2m due to the high tide phenomenon.

Razak said the problem could be overcome by replanting mangrove trees to rejuvenate the ecosystem.



**Meor Razak Meor Abdul Rahman**

"After the tsunami in 2004, the authorities issued orders to preserve mangrove trees at least 500m from the shore," he said.

He said during the 70th National Land Council meeting, it was agreed that the mangrove forests in permanent forest reserves should be maintained.

He said the meeting also agreed that the protected forests should be expanded with more land for mangroves under the state government gazetted, as it would become a "security of tenure" for such an important ecosystem.

Razak said although the reclamation here was already approved, the NGOs hoped that the state government would take action to stop the problem from worsening.



**The mangrove forest that has been reclaimed in Pantai Remis, Perak.**  
Pic by Mohammed Arsyad Md Yasin

"We are fine with any development projects as long as Mother Nature is protected," he said, refuting claims made by the authorities that NGOs were always opposed to development projects.

Sungai Batu Pantai Tin fisherman Rodzi Arop, 59, said the floods had worsened due to the reclamation project, adding that effluents from the shrimp farms, which began operation in 2006, had killed the mangrove trees.

"Previously, the high tide never hit

our homes as the mangrove trees reduced the impact."

He said the mangrove forest had protected the village from the impact of the 2004 tsunami.

"Although fishing boats and jetties were damaged by the tsunami, our village was intact, thanks to the thick mangrove forest," he said.

Rodzi said the villagers were scared that their homes would be damaged by floods and tsunami if the mangrove forest were not protected.