

Destroying wetlands invites more disasters

NSF 1/2

WORLD Wetlands Day will be celebrated tomorrow. 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.

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 it can have a serious impact on the water cycle in a catchment

area. This was evident in Kota Tinggi town in the recent floods in Johor.

Wetlands are often cited as playing an important role in the water cycle. Studies have revealed that this is true but there are some differences between the role of different types of wetlands. Most wetlands in flood plains do actually reduce or delay floods. Wetlands also generally increase evaporation and thus reduce the river flow.

Note that Kota Tinggi was one of the worst hit towns in the recent floods. Are we aware that among the worst hit was the new town develop-

ment 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 Malaysia in order to protect our vital wetlands.

In light of the recent floods, we hope our decision makers initiate drastic measures to ensure that all projects in the Ninth Malaysia Plan adhere to basic environmental policies



Destroying the fragile wetland ecosystems could be damaging to a country's rich biodiversity.

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 ecosystems is damaging our nation's rich biodiversity, fragile landscape and legacy.

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