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Letter to the Editor

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**International Day for the Conservation of Mangrove Ecosystem:  
All Parties Must Commit To Protect and Conserve Mangrove Forests**

On July 26 every year, the world celebrates the International Day for the Conservation of Mangrove Ecosystem. This celebration was declared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to raise awareness of the importance of mangrove ecosystems including coastal areas to ensure the continuity of its role for global well-being.

Coastal mangrove forest refers to an area of forest in the coastal intertidal zone. The main species here consist of mangrove tree species that serve as defensive stands or coastal fortification and fishery resources.

A mangrove forest is an area with high biodiversity value, consisting of various species of mangrove trees such as bruguiera, rhizophora, avicennia, sonneratia, etc. The mangrove forest is also habitat for various species of fauna such as monkeys, snakes, otters, birds as well as for various types of shellfish, crustaceans and fish.

This natural ecosystem is also able to reduce vulnerability to natural disasters, extreme climatic events and is our natural coastal defence system. The dense growth of mangrove forests is able to protect against property destruction and loss of lives by absorbing the velocity of waves and calming the currents during natural disasters. Mangroves protect coastal settlements by absorbing 70 to 90 percent of wave energy depending on the physical characteristics and health of the ecosystem in an area.

Mangroves are a carbon sink. The results of a carbon assessment study found that mangrove trees aged 4 to 13 years old can store carbon between 7.25 to 83.35 tons of carbon with a rate of carbon sequestration between 1.7 to 6.0 tons of carbon per hectare per year. Therefore, mangrove trees are a unique natural stand where this species is able to reduce the effects of global warming and climate change.

Mangrove forests are very important for fishery resource by providing food and habitat to juvenile fish and a variety of marine life. The unique roots of the mangrove trees serve as a nursery and generate source of food as well as a place for young fish and other marine life.

According to a study, a 400km<sup>2</sup> of managed mangrove forest in Matang, Perak, supports a fishery value of USD100 million per year or USD250,000/km<sup>2</sup>/year (UNEP-WCMC 2006). Thus conserving mangrove forests is protecting our seafood resources, contributing to the country's food security and sovereignty.

In addition, fruits and leaves from selected mangrove species can be processed and given added value to support the local economy. Among the traditional snacks and traditional cakes made from mangrove fruits or leaves are onde-onde buah api-api, lepat buah api-api, bubur buah berus, juice from berembang fruit, tea from jeruju leaves and fritters made from piai leaves.

There are special preparation methods before the mangrove fruits and leaves can be used and eaten. Sahabat

Alam Malaysia (SAM) with input from the women's group in the Penang Inshore Fishermen Welfare Association (PIFWANITA) and other mangrove community groups has documented these processes and recipes to popularise the use of resources from mangrove forests.

The efforts to protect and conserve mangrove forests must be intensified. Degraded areas must be rehabilitated. SAM together with coastal and local communities as well as volunteers conduct many activities to conserve coastal areas to rehabilitate these important habitats, restore the function of mangrove ecosystems and biodiversity, and contribute to improved livelihoods.

Therefore, in conjunction with the International Day for the Conservation of Mangrove Ecosystem, SAM calls on all parties to give their full commitment to maintain the mangrove forest and coastal areas as natural areas. SAM believes that conserving and improving the mangrove forest ecosystem will provide infinite value to our country's nature, biodiversity, and food resources.

Mangrove forests play a diverse role and function.

Mangroves for Biodiversity,

Mangroves for Coastal Defence,

Mangroves for Fisheries Resources,

Mangroves for the Economy, and

Mangroves for Livelihood.

Protect and conserve our mangroves ecosystem.

**Meenakshi Raman**

**Presiden**

**Sahabat Alam Malaysia**