

Dept: RM15 million slated for proposed croc sanctuary

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Awang Yusof (seated centre), flanked by Azahari (seated left) and Arifin, joins the participants in giving their thumbs-up to the camera after the programme launch.

SIBU: The proposed crocodile sanctuary in the Kuching Wetlands will be the first of its kind in Sarawak. It is said that the tender for the RM15-million project could be out next year.

According to Forest Department assistant director (environment preservation and gazetting division) Azahari Omar, a consultant has been appointed by the Public Works Department (JKR) for the project. “This is a Sarawak government project and it will become one of the tourist attractions, especially in Kuching.

“Those crocodiles, specifically those from the CRZ (crocodile removable zone) will be placed there (the Kuching Wetlands sanctuary),” he said in an interview after the launch of a ‘Crocodile Sustainable Management Programme in Sarawak’ here yesterday, where Sibü District Officer Awang Yusof Awang Mostapha represented Sibü Resident to officiate at the ceremony.

Sibü Forest Department officer Arifin Awang Zulkifli was also present. The programme involved 193 participants from this division, comprising local community leaders, as well as representatives from various government departments and agencies. Adding on, Azahari said similar sanctuary could also be built in Miri and Lawas, subjected to availability of government funding. On a separate matter, he said 60 licences to hunt ‘buaya katak’ (estuarine crocodiles) and 30 licences for trading had been issued across Sarawak.

However, he also acknowledged that because of certain taboos, not many people ‘dared’ to apply for these licences. As means to warn the public, he said signboards had been erected at places identified as having high crocodile population. On the objectives of the programme, Azahari said it served to provide information about ‘buaya katak’ – a protected species under the Wild Life Protection Ordinance 1998.

“Under the ‘Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna – or CITES’, (‘buaya katak’) is listed under Appendix II – where products from these crocodiles can be exported or traded overseas – but there are several conditions or quota fixed by CITES in Geneva.”

Azahari said to hunt estuarine crocodiles, a licence is required from Sarawak Forest Department through the controller of wildlife – as stipulated under Wild Life Protection Ordinance 1998. “Likewise, to sell or export products from this type of crocodile, permission must be obtained from controller of wildlife,” he added.

Back on the programme, Azahari said the roadshow kicked off in Lawas before heading to Miri, Sarikei and Sibul. The next stop would be in Sri Aman next Monday.

On the CRZ, Azahari said it also covers tourist spots such as the waterfronts in Miri, Kuching and Sibul. Meanwhile in his speech, Awang Yusof called upon the public to alert the Forest Department should they come across areas with large crocodile population, as the first step to reduce the number of cases involving crocodile-human conflicts. In this regard, he stated that 12 crocodile attacks were reported in Sarawak last year, of which three occurred along the Rajang River.