Vital coral rehabilitation

Groups join forces to ensure healthy eco-system

Dateline: Tioman

THE Malaysian Institute of Architects (PAM) and Reef Check Malaysia (RCM) plans to raise awareness on the impact the construction industry has on local coral reefs.

PAM and selected members have partnered RCM to rehabilitate coral reefs on the islands of Pangkor (Perak) and Tioman (Pahang).

PAM, the first professional body to spearhead the CSR programme, first created an awareness campaign followed by an on-site coral reef rehabilitation.

The group visited Tioman recently and had scheduled the programme in Pangkor on Nov 16 and 17.

Once found abundant in Pangkor, healthy reefs are rarely sighted these days.

RCM planned to conduct environmental awareness talks for PAM members at various locations throughout the year.

Due to coral farms being an attraction for snorkellers, the objectives of the rehabilitation would help to determine the snorkelling methods used.

Coral reefs cover less than 1% of the world's oceans yet are among the most diverse, complex and productive ecosystems.

It makes more sense to preserve the coral reefs rather than rebuild them years later after they are severely damaged or destroyed.

Often mistaken for simple rocks, corals are animals that reproduce and grow as well as reefs that contribute to building the ocean's ecosystem.

The "rainforest of the sea", host 25% of all marine species of the world's oceans and helped absorb excess carbon dioxide.

Without preventive measures, Malaysians may soon find themselves with irreversibly damaged coral reefs, food shortage and job displacement.

In 2009, global initiative The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) released a report by eminent scientists who estimated the value of coral reefs to be US$115,740 per hectare per year.

This placed Malaysia's coral reefs, with a cover of 4,000 sq km, at a value of RM145bil per year.

Malaysia is also part of the Coral Triangle, an area recognised by scientists to have the world's highest marine biodiversity.

The country has a hard coral diversity estimated at 550 species in Sabah and Sarawak and 360 species in Peninsula Malaysia.

RCM's approach to rehabilitate the corals are combining coral nurseries with coral transplanting with help from coral reef ecologist Kee Alfian from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM).

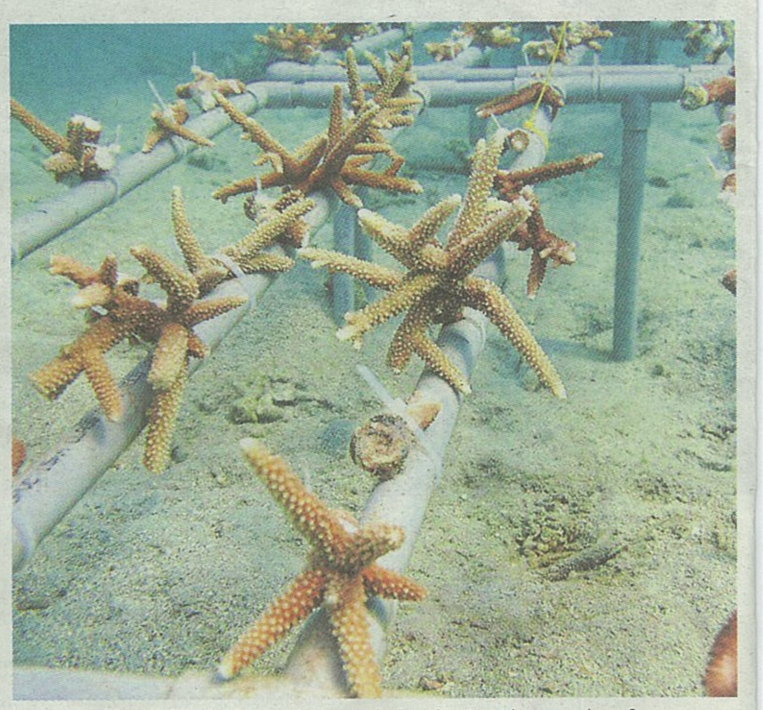
Nubbins or coral fragments are secured onto plastic pipe frames in a nursery and are serviced for about six months.

The nurseries are serviced regularly to clean away silt and algae that accumulate on the pipe work frames. If not cleaned, they can smother and kill the nubbins.

If the growth rate of the nubbins are satisfactory, they will be transplanted onto damaged coral reefs to encourage natural growth and restoration.

First conducted in Pangkor, RCM has since established rehabilitation sites on the islands of Redang, Perhentian and Tioman – where most of the work had been conducted.

Alive: This is what healthy coral reefs look like.



Rehab: Frames filled with broken corals for the Pangkor coral reef rehabilitation project carried out by PAM in collaboration with Reef Check Malaysia.