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Showing the way

By **EE-LYN TAN**

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**Issues such as global warming are making the news far too often these days. With World Environment Day coming up on Tuesday, what are students doing in the battle to save the world?**

SOARING temperatures. Erratic weather conditions. Pollution. These are only a few of the many signs reflective of the sad state of the environment today.

Creating worldwide awareness about the urgent need to protect the world we live in should concern everyone, and the theme for this year's World Environment Day, Melting Ice – A Hot Topic?, is a timely reminder that we can no longer ignore such pressing issues.

So where do students in Malaysia stand in all this?



AIMS Grade Six student Claudia and others have been sticking up these messages to remind students to recycle, not litter. – RAJA SHAMSUL BAHREN / The Star

*StarEducation* asked around and discovered that many are anything but ignorant about the threats facing the planet. In fact, some are among the most passionate supporters of efforts to make a real difference.

At SMK(P) Sri Aman, Petaling Jaya, environmental projects are an everyday

affair in the bid to make it a “green school”.



This effort involves a partnership between the students and teachers.

“It's everybody's duty to keep the environment clean,” says principal Alainal Hasani Md Noor.

“We need to create the awareness in our students so that they can help to spread the awareness to their families and their communities.”

**ALAINAL:** It's everybody's duty to keep the environment clean.

One prominent project is “rain-water harvesting” and using the water collected in the toilets of one of the school blocks.

The system was implemented in December, with several upgrades done since then.

Mathematics and Science head and project coordinator Yeap Kooi Ngoh says a filter was recently installed.

“Because the roofs and gutters are old, the water can be dirty, so the filter ensures that the water is cleaner when the flush is pulled,” she says. About 6,200 litres of water has been collected to date.

Another project that sees active participation from the students is the making of organic compost out of canteen waste and leaves from the school grounds.

According to Science teacher and project coordinator Siti Norakizan Jalaluddin, the process calls for a mixture of organic waste and black soil.

“Black soil is very fertile. It contains a lot of micro-organisms that degrades the waste faster,” she explains.

Students help out once a week by chopping the fruit and vegetable waste into small pieces before mixing them into the compost.

And contrary to expectations, they do not think the activity as “icky”.

“There have been times where we've found worms and snails in the compost, which I think is really cute!” says Form One student Yap Eva, 13.

It takes two to three months for the compost to mature, at which point it will be “fed” to the multitude of plants and trees found around the school.

There may be more in the offing.

The school has been earmarked by the United Nations Development Programme to be included under its solar project, which will see solar panels being installed on the roof to conserve electricity.

“We will know by the end of the year whether our school has been selected,”



**BARNES:** Students learn of the need to make an effort individually.

says Alinal.



CIMP students Muhammed Ikwan and Hidayat from SyUC picking up discarded items on their recent trek up Gunung Irau in Cameron Highlands. – TAN MENG CHWEN

### Recycling for a cause

Recycling projects are not unusual in schools, but SMK Taman Tun Dr Ismail in Kuala Lumpur has taken things a step further by running a project that has a value-added element.

In recent months, students have collected an astounding 21,000 tabs from aluminium cans for an effort known as “Tab-a-leg”.

Headed by the school's History/Geography/Environment Society, this collection was started in early February in support of the Prostheses Foundation in Thailand, led by Dr Therdchai Jivacate.

With every one kilogram of tabs (or 3,000), the organisation can make the joints of at least two artificial limbs.

Dr Terdchai, a prosthesis specialist, has been fashioning artificial legs with parts made from recycled aluminium so that they are rust-free,

lighter and easier to use.

The aim of the foundation is to provide free prostheses to amputees in Thailand regardless of their race or religion.

Project leader Nurhafizah Kamaruddin, 17, was the student who pitched the idea to the society. She learnt about it through a booklet from a children's conference on saving the environment, organised by the Yayasan Anak Warisan Alam (YAWA) last year.

“This is a project we took up with very few expectations. We predicted that we would collect around 3,000 tabs but it exploded into an amount beyond our imagination,” said the Form Five student.

With “Peace Week” coming up in September, the students hope to collect enough tabs to present to Dr Therdchai, who will be visiting Kuala Lumpur then.

And what is their target? A grand total of 50,000 tabs by National Day.

“Word of mouth has really been a great influence in encouraging the students to bring in their tabs.

“Even though we provided a zip-lock bag in each classroom, I've had students passing me their tabs during recess or leaving them on my table in the staff room,” says S. Bharathi, who is the teacher in charge.

The History and Geography teacher adds that the project is also about teaching the students to go the extra mile.

“Some students had asked when we first started why don't they just donate RM1 each, but collecting tabs has meant that they are making the effort to get them,” says Bharathi.



Getting their hands into it!  
Making compost is a weekly affair for students at SMK(P) Sri Aman.

YAWA chairman Khadijah Abdul Rahman echoes her sentiments and hopes to expand this project to other schools after the success seen in SMK Taman Tun Dr Ismail.

“Projects like these will teach students about social responsibility and show them that it doesn't take much to make a difference,” says Khadijah.

“Money is not everything and this will help them to understand what giving is all about.”

Apart from recycling, the school can also be proud of the mark its Scouts movement is actively making.

It boasts a bird sanctuary, a pond and aquariums, all maintained by the boys themselves.

Fed faithfully by the Scouts daily, the fauna collection ranges from quails and fish to freshwater prawns and even tortoises.

A recent addition to the family of animals is seven tortoise hatchlings, which caused quite a stir among the school community when they arrived.

“Breeding tortoises in captivity is very difficult, so we are very pleased to have welcomed so many on top of the ones we already have!” says Science teacher Mohd Azhar Md Salleh.

### **Teaching for the future**

“Preventing local concerns from becoming global issues” is the focus of the Student Environment Committee (SEC) at the Australian International School Malaysia (AISM) in Seri Kembangan.

Meeting once a week, the 50-odd members get together on Fridays at lunchtime to discuss environmental issues. The first thing on their agenda? Recycling and cleaning up the environment.



SMK Taman Tun Dr Ismail Geography teacher Leow Kam Ying (third from right), YAWA's Khadijah and students with a heap of the aluminium can tabs collected for the "Tab-a-Leg" programme.

They have already taken the initiative to place a box in each classroom for paper meant for recycling as well as put in a scrap box to encourage students to reuse paper that has been used only on one side.

To take things further, the committee is now in the midst of raising funds to purchase proper recycling bins.

"We will be selling green ribbons for RM1 each as well as holding a second-hand book sale where all funds collected will be channelled back to the SEC," explains AISM Environment Committee chair and teacher Angela Barnes.

The students feel that the lack of trash bins and recycling bins is an issue that will affect society.

"We are the future, and it's our job to ensure that we look after the world because

if we don't look do it now, what is going to happen in the future?" questions Year Six student Abbey Morris.

Claudia Anson, also from the same year, agrees.

"We need to create the awareness and start from young so that cleaning up the environment becomes a natural act," says the 12-year-old.

The older students have also taken the initiative to enquire about the recycling bins needed.

"We've done our research and called up many places including DBKL (Kuala Lumpur City Hall) to find out about purchasing these bins. The ones we're looking at cost RM120 each," says Year 12 student Amalina Ismail, 17.

To reinforce the message, Barnes has created quirky flash cards with messages like "It's not cool to rubbish your school!" and "Be a winner! Use the binner."

These have been put up around the school with the students' help.

"It has been a great opportunity for students from all year levels to come together and work towards common goals that are not realised in regular classroom settings," Barnes says.

"With projects like these, students have learnt that they will suffer as a community if they don't make an effort individually."

### **Caring for other trekkers**

While some students are cleaning up the environment on the ground, Sunway University College (SyUc) Canadian International Matriculation Programme students are doing it in higher altitudes amidst spectacular views and fresh air.

But the situation is not as breathtaking beautiful as it may seem.

Instead, students are left to deal with campsites defaced with garbage and graffiti left behind by selfish visitors.

Led by English lecturer Tan Meng Chwen, the Trekking Club has between 10 and 20 students who have trekked up several hills and mountains around the peninsula, cleaning up along the way.



SMK Taman Tun Dr Ismail students (from left) Syahirah Kamarudin, L. Sivaneshwaran and Nurhafizah putting trash in the appropriate bins after their meal at the school canteen.

Their latest *gotong-royong*, on Monday, was a five-hour night trek up Gunung Irau in picturesque Cameron Highlands, where they were met with the depressing sight of all kinds of trash – shoes, socks, tin cans, mineral water bottles and glass ones, to name a few.

“Gunung Irau is so enchanting, like a scene right out of a fairytale with the mossy trees and lush landscape, but the plain laziness of visitors has tarnished its beauty and is giving a bad image to our country,” says student Farah Hanani Shamsuddin, 19.

Her coursemate Muhammed Ikwan, from Indonesia, concurs.

“There's so much trash that sometimes it doesn't make any difference even after we've cleaned up as much as we can.

“It's unbelievable how inconsiderate some campers can be. This exercise is definitely a wake-up call to trekkers to take their garbage back with them and not leave anything behind,” says the 17-year old.

The group came down with seven large garbage bags of trash, with one weighing as much as 7kg – which called for a lot of work when they were trekking downhill.

On their earlier excursion several weeks ago, the team brought down 26 bags of trash from Gunung Datuk in Negri Sembilan.

They had also taken up five litres of thinner and patiently removed graffiti from rocks at the peak.

“Although performing 10 hours of community service is compulsory for the

students to graduate, many have joined the treks of their own will,” says Tan.

“Some have complained that it has been physical torture and mental anguish, but it has also given them a new sense of appreciation of nature.

“It is also a way for them to give back to society.”

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