

Sago waste turned into dye for fabrics

TREE OF LIFE: Unimas team converts pollution problem into a money-spinner

DENNIS WONG

KUCHING

news@nst.com.my

MUKAH is home to Sarawak's sago industry, but its waste is endangering the Melanau community's environment.

The Environment Department had issued warnings to several producers as more than 300 tonnes of sago waste are discharged into rivers each day.

With such a large volume of waste, the expertise of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) was sought and it had come up with several uses for the waste.

One of them is to use the waste as

dye for fabrics.

This idea came from Unimas Design Technology Department Associate Prof Dr Nazlina Shaari and her team.

Their idea of turning sago waste into fabric dye won an award at the British Innovation Show in London recently.

"Fabric designers in Europe are keen on going back to nature in their work.

"They do not use paraffin wax any more and we have found that sago can be used both as wax and fabric dye at the same time," Nazlina said when met by the *New Straits Times*.

Although the dye compound has

yet to be perfected, Nazlina and her team has come up with several fabrics that are being marketed using the dye.

"We have proved that the sago tree is truly the tree of life as the Melanau call it. It not only provides food, its waste also has uses."

Another design team from the university, which also took part in the London show, showcased the use of sago waste as a fire retardant and sound buffering material.

This was done by combining the waste from the sago tree with polystyrene.

"All these are from sago and polystyrene waste that people normally throw away. Now they are material much sought after in construction and even in the music industry," said Unimas Resource Science and Technology Programme coordinator Zainab Ngaini.