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Singapore building world's first island made of ash

(Kyodo) _ Singapore is building the world's first man-made island created almost entirely from ash from the country's garbage incinerators and has turned part of it into a nature haven.

The island is being built from scratch from an active offshore dumping ground, located about 8 kilometers south of Marina Bay, the southern waterfront near Singapore's central business district.

The National Environment Agency -- which comes under the Ministry of Environment and Water Resources, and oversees the project --says it will be the first landfill island in the world made largely of non-organic waste material -- 80% ash and the rest bulky non-burnable, inorganic waste such as strong metals.

The dumping ground is currently 10% filled and is envisaged to become a 3.5 square kilometer island when full, in about 40 years.

Not dumping organic waste has its advantages.

"It will not affect the environment," according to an NEA spokeswoman. "We don't have to worry about toxic gas released and bad smell, pollution."

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Although 1,400 tons of waste has been dumped there daily, the area is teeming with mangrove swamps and coral reefs and has become an oasis for wild birds and marine life.

Part of the site has been opened for nature lovers with the local bird society, a recreational fishing club and a research group from a local university to conduct trips to the area.

Singapore spent about S\$610 million (\$362 million) to build a 7-km-long bund around two small existing islands, Pulau Semakau and Pulau Sakeng, to create an enclosure for the dumping ground between them, engaging a U.S. consultant to advise on technology for

protective membranes.

The landfill began operations in 1999 after the last landfill on Singapore's mainland closed down.

The government has not decided on what to do with the island when it is finished. The site is now called Semakau Landfill.

"We might give it a nicer name in future," the spokeswoman said.

The city-state of 4 million people is suffering a shortage of land for future growth and has been

vigorously reclaiming land from the sea.

Reclamation work over the past decades has expanded Singapore's size from 580 square km to the current 683 square km.

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