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ICSC – A CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR TROPICAL FOREST RESEARCH IN THE MAKING

TONGOD - The Imbak Canyon Learning Centre (ICSC) is poised to be a centre of excellence in tropical rainforest research, education and capacity building with an emphasis on Malaysian participation and contributions said the Director of Yayasan Sabah, Datuk Haji Jamalul Kiram bin Datuk Haji Mohd. Zakaria.

He said, against the unique backdrop of Imbak Canyon Conservation Area (ICCA), Yayasan Sabah Group envisaged ICSC to be developed as a research hub and environmental research on biodiversity.

"As of December 2018, a total of 55 research has been conducted in ICCA, which will pave the way for Yayasan Sabah Group to intensify its exploration of pharmaceutical and biotechnology potential at ICCA," he explained.

"The pharmaceutical and biotechnology potential of ICCA is widespread and needs to be explored. Research on the antimicrobial and antioxidant properties of medicinal plants found at ICCA by researchers from Monash University Malaysia is a step forward in this field," he further explained.

He said this at the Opening Ceremony of the Imbak Canyon Learning Centre (ICSC), Tongod District held on 26 March 2019 at the ICSC, which was officiated by the Chief Minister of Sabah cum Chairman of Yayasan Sabah Board of Trustees, Datuk Seri Panglima Haji Mohd. Shafie bin Haji Apdal.

Touching on the diversity of biodiversity at ICCA, Datuk Jamalul said ICCA has a diversity of flora and fauna, especially medicinal plants that make it an important area of botanical gene banks and for the purpose of protecting the quality of the river system.

ICCA has a diversity of plant biodiversity, which is more than 600 species recorded today and that this amount will increase through exploration and further investigation.

"The ICCA has recorded 82 species of mammals, including Clouded leopard, Marbled cat, Proboscis monkey, Orang utan, Bornean gibbon, Banteng, Sun Bear and Bornean pygmy elephant. A total of 242 species of birds has been recorded consisting of a combination of lowland and mountainous species, including six species of pitta, eight species of Borneo hornbill and 20 species of flycatcher," he said.

Being a natural forest, ICCA has a key role in being a gene bank for forest rehabilitation in the future.

"ICCA is also an important component of the biodiversity corridor, especially the mammal wildlife, connecting the Maliau Basin to the south and the Danum Valley to the east. It also serves as a water catchment area for the longest river system in Sabah, the Kinabatangan River," he explained.

Located 30 kilometres or about 90 minutes' four-wheel drive from Kampung Imbak, Tongod, ICCA, which is a designated Class 1 (Protection) Forest, is located north of the Maliau Basin with a size of 27,599 hectares. This area is one of the largest areas of unlogged lowland dipterocarp forest in Sabah dipterocarps and is surrounded by high sandstone ridges. ICCA is also home to a multitude of beautiful waterfalls.

ICSC, which is the gateway to ICCA, has a total area of 27 hectares equipped with various facilities related to research, education, training and nature recreation. There are six research stations, namely Tampoi, Batu Timbang, Kangkawat, Kuli, Pinang-Pinang and Kapur with one hydrology station, one weather station, as well as the availability of experienced and qualified research assistants supporting research programmes at ICCA.

ICSC was initiated from the collaboration between Sabah Yayasan Group and PETRONAS which began in 2010 to develop this area as a basic learning centre for local communities in biodiversity conservation as well as gene banks conservation and exploration of pharmaceutical and biological potentials. The total amount of sponsorship by PETRONAS for ICCA is RM83 million.

“Among the key achievement of this collaboration are, the establishment of the Imbak Canyon Porters and Guides Association, whose membership comprised of village youths living within Imbak Canyon and Tongod district. The association was established with the aim of developing the capacity of youth by providing porters and guide services for visitors to Imbak Canyon,” said Datuk Haji Jamalul.

“The Imbak Canyon Strategic Management Plan 2014-2023 has been published. This plan covers the framework of activities to be implemented in ICCA within ten years. In addition, efforts to promote environmental education in ICCA have been intensified with the publication of the Environmental Education Module. This module is a guide for officers and rangers in carrying out environmental education activities specifically in Imbak Canyon,” he added.

“I would also like to add that an illustrated book on Imbak entitled, *Finding the Secrets of Imbak Canyon* is also one of the outputs of this collaboration and hopefully through this book, children will appreciate ICCA conservation efforts. In 2014, PETRONAS contributed a fund of RM77 million to the Sabah Yayasan Group to realise the ICSC construction project covering an area of 27 hectares,” he said.

"With the facilities available at ICSC, it will be able to accommodate more visitors and researchers at any one time. This is in view of the strategic location of the Imbak Canyon near Tongod, Telupid and Pinangah and is the gateway to the vast Ulu Kinabatangan area," said Datuk Haji Jamalul.

"More social and ethnographic researchers will be conducted besides scientific ones. ICSC is now a landmark for the Tongod district and destined to be an ecotourism attraction. In

addition, with the facilities provided at the ICSC, locals, especially young people can be given training and exposure on environmentally sound and systematic education," he added.

In disclosing the role of Sabah Yayasan Group in improving the quality of life of Malaysians in Sabah, Datuk Haji Jamalul said, "The construction of ICSC will open more jobs and business opportunities for communities living within the vicinity of the Imbak Canyon area especially in the field of hospitality, research, tourism and rangers."

"Indirectly, the construction of ICSC has proven the close cooperation between Yayasan Sabah Group and PETRONAS towards conservation efforts as well as the social development of Tongod and its residents in particular and Sabah in general," he explained.

In the quest of promoting research activities in ICCA, Datuk Haji Jamalul said, "Through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2016 between the Imbak Canyon Management Committee, the Imbak Rainforest Training and Research Program (ICCRTP) was created to promote research activities in the ICCA. This programme is led by the Academy of Sciences Malaysia. The focus of the programme is to increase the capacity of local scientists in the physical study, landscape ecology and biodiversity of Malaysian rainforest."

"As one of the leaders in sustainable forest management in the state, Yayasan Sabah Group has allocated five conservation areas, namely, Danum Valley, Maliau Basin, Imbak Canyon, Taliwas River and Silam Coast as a natural heritage for generations to come. Basically, these conservation areas are a research destination and place for field training by individuals, institutions and local and foreign organisations," said Datuk Haji Jamalul.

In reiterating on the loss of revenue due to conservation, Datuk Haji Jamalul commented, "Indeed, these conservation areas are of great value if they are designated as logging areas. It is inevitably a huge loss to Yayasan Sabah Group when we refrain the areas commercially. Nevertheless, the Yayasan Sabah Group is committed to ensuring that conservation in these conservation areas continues for generations to come. Long-term benefits prioritised, not just short-term gains."

“Additionally, these conservation areas also have ecotourism potentials with the richness of flora and fauna biodiversity as well as complete accommodation facilities,” he added.

As of December 2018, a total of 913 research has been conducted in the conservation areas of the Danum Valley, Maliau Basin and Imbak Canyon. At the same time, 257 individuals successfully completed their PhDs; 219 Postgraduate and 176 students with Master's Degree as a result of research conducted in Danum Valley, Maliau Basin and Imbak Canyon.

A MoU between Yayasan Sabah Group and Yayasan PETRONAS, the Corporate Social Responsibility arm of PETRONAS, was also penned during the event which sought to explore the potential of sustainable development efforts in ICCA. The MoU will undoubtedly enhance the collaboration amongst the relevant stakeholders in promoting sustainable development programmes in ICCA.



Datuk Haji Jamalul mingled with members of the Sabah Nature Club comprising of students from Sekolah Menengah Telupid, Entilibon and Tongod near Imbak Waterfall.



Prof. Dr. Abdul Hamid Ahmad, Lecturer, Institute for Tropical Biology and Conservation, Universiti Malaysia Sabah (right), pointing out the types of flora and fauna currently identified at ICCA to Datuk Haji Jamalul (left), Datuk Seri Haji Mohd. Shafie (third, left) and other VIP guests at the ICSC Scientific Laboratory.



ONE FOR THE ALBUM...Datuk Haji Jamalul (left), sharing a light moment with PETRONAS Group Chief Executive Officer, Tan Sri Wan Zulkiflee Wan Ariffin (second left), Datuk Seri Haji Mohd. Shafie (second right) and Chairman of PETRONAS and Yayasan PETRONAS, Datuk Ahmad Nizam Salleh (right) while enjoying the scenic Imbak Waterfall.



Datuk Haji Jamalul (second left) describing the 3D ICCA model to the VIP guests at the ICCA Gallery.



MoU signing between Yayasan Sabah Group and Yayasan PETRONAS signed between Datuk Haji Jamalul for Yayasan Sabah Group and Head of Legal Corporate Services PETRONAS cum Yayasan PETRONAS Board of Trustees, Encik Ahmad Redza B A Ahmad (seated, right) for Yayasan PETRONAS on exploring the potential of sustainable development efforts in ICCA witnessed by Datuk Seri Haji Mohd. Shafie (standing, third right).



PLANTING A HOPE...Datuk Haji Jamalul (second right) planted a tree alongside other dignitaries in conjunction with the launching of ICSC.

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