



# Telecentres to link urban and rural areas, says CM

By Tiong Sue Yii

**KUCHING:** Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) has earned praises for its efforts in promoting Information and Communication Technology (ICT) throughout the State to bridge the digital divide between the rural and urban areas.

"Unimas has been very active in conducting ICT programmes as well as helping the government in setting up telecentres which is important to connect settlements spread all over the State. Just imagine it took us two weeks to travel by land and water from Bario to Marudi and finally to Lawas. With the setting up a telecentre, e-Bario, it really makes a difference in bridging the existing digital divide," said Chief Minister Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud yesterday at the closing of the 3rd International Conference on Information Technology in Asia (CITA '03).

Renowned speakers from Australia and New Zealand and also Unimas presented their papers at the two-day conference.

Taib believed that the solution to achieve links between the rural and urban areas was to set up telecommunication centres in the rural areas. He said Mukah, being newly declared a division, would be electronically linked to Sibu this year.

He also commended Unimas for its role in the smart school project in the city.

"The smart school projects are doing quite well thanks to Unimas students who helped a lot. SMK Tun Abang Haji Openg's students are inspired by e-learning and they readily embraced ICT and have shown creativity in their studies," he said.

Among those present were Deputy Chief Minister Tan Sri Datuk Amar Dr George Chan, Assistant Minister of Environment and Public Health Dr Soon Choon Teck, Assistant



**OVER TO YOU ...** Bujang Nor presents a souvenir to Taib (left) as K. Narayanan (second left) and Yusuf Hadi (partially hidden) look on.

Minister of Housing Dr Abang Abdul Rauf Abang Zen, State Secretary Datuk Amar Abdul Aziz Husain, Unimas Board of Directors chairman Tan Sri Datuk Amar Bujang Nor, CITA '03 organising chairman Associate Professor K. Narayanan, and Unimas Vice Chancellor Professor Datuk Yusuf Hadi. Speaking to reporters later, Taib disclosed that fibre optics was installed only along the main trunk roads in Sarawak which explained the fact that Mukah was by-passed.

"Now that Mukah has become a division, a lot more developments are going to take place and economic activities are going to accelerate about four to five years from now.

"We need the (electronic link) e-link since doing the fibre optics links will be quite

expensive and it takes time. So we decided to use wireless in connecting Sibu directly to Mukah and spreading out to places like Matu Daro and Balingian," he said.

The State government was experimenting with a RM2 million-pilot programme on wireless technology in Mukah which was expected to be completed by year end, he added. He said Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) would work on the project jointly with the state government using direct wireless connection from Sibu. "I think the coastal area would be not as difficult as the interior areas because it is quite flat and thus easy for wireless airwaves to reach the place. It can be done in Mukah relatively cheap at about RM1 million to be linked to Sibu," he added.