

# Heart of Borneo, a joint commitment to conserve, protect diverse world ecosystem

Perspective By Anak Sarawak

The State government has taken initiatives to identify and gazette several tracts of natural forests, consisting of national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and nature reserves, as totally protected areas (TPAs) with the target of one million hectares by 2020.

Up to now, 47 TPAs, with a total area of 808,100 hectares, have been gazetted; it is short of 200,000 to the target by 2020.

The State government is committed towards biodiversity conservation and makes conscientious efforts towards achieving the target.

The seven new TPAs, with a total area of approximately 33,000 hectares that have been gazetted during the last six months, are Dered Krian National Park, Sungai Meluang National Park Extension, Limbang Mangrove National Park, Pulong Tau National Park Extension, Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary Extension, Fairy Cave Nature Reserve and Pulau Tun Ahmad Zaidi Nature Reserve.

The Minister with Special Functions in the Chief Minister's office, Tan Sri Datuk Amar Haji Adenan Bin Haji Satem gives the details in winding the debate on Budget 2014 during the just-concluded sitting of the State Legislative Assembly.

He says a conservation and ecological study, conducted by Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) with volunteers from Malaysian Nature Society, Sarawak Forest Corporation and residents of Piasau Camp, which was completed on May 2013, indicates that the area is a suitable habitat for the Oriental-pied Hornbill and many other species of flora and fauna.

Hence, the State government has agreed to gazette Piasau Camp with an area of 76.5 hectares as a nature reserve to provide an additional recreational area for Miri City.

Sarawak will host the International Hornbill Conference, a prestigious conference, to bring in hornbill experts from all over the world to Sarawak in 2017. It is a testimony of the state's relentless efforts in hornbill conservation.

Tan Sri Adenan says the state is collaborating with Malaysia Liquefied Natural Gas Sendirian Berhad (MLNG) in Biodiversity, Environment and Conservation (BEACON) project in marine conservation.

For example, a total of 1,500 reef balls will be deployed over a period of three years under the project with the primary objective of conserving marine biodiversity adjacent to Similajau National

Park using reef balls. To date, 750 reef balls have been deployed within the area.

The project also includes baseline studies on marine and coastal resources, communication, education and public awareness programmes.

More tukun as fishery sanctuaries will be built along the Sarawak coast land to conserve national resources and promote fishing, port fishing and tourism in the areas.

Besides, Sarawak is also collaborating with University Malaysia Sabah and University Malaysia Terengganu to conduct various researches on marine species and ecosystem of Kuala Lawas.

Preliminary studies indicate that the area, with the potential to become a totally protected area, can support viable population of dugong.

The State government is also collaborating with UNIMAS to prepare Integrated Management Plan of Kuching Wetland National Park.

Tan Sri Adenan says major population centres such as Kuching City, Miri City, Sibul, Bintulu, Sri Aman, Limbang, Niah and popular recreation areas like Semariang-Pasir Pandak, Pasir Panjang, Damai Beach and Siar Beach are identified as Crocodile-Free Zones.

The presence of crocodiles in these areas will not be tolerated and they will be removed.

This year, 20 crocodiles, under the Holistic Crocodile Resource Inventory for Sarawak covering all major river systems, have been removed from rivers including those from Crocodile-Free Zones.

He says the first wild life monitoring and rescue operation for Bakun Hydro dam, which was completed last year, successfully rescued and relocated a total of 1,522 animals and 33,715 seedlings.

The final report on the exercise was handed over to Sarawak Hydro Sendirian Berhad on 21 June, 2013. A similar exercise funded by Sarawak Energy Berhad (SEB) is being conducted in Murum hydro dam since May 2013.

The State government together with UNIMAS organised the 2nd International Conference on Alfred Russel Wallace on 7 and 8 November, 2013 to commemorate the 100 years of the passing of Alfred Russel Wallace, a great naturalist, who came to Sarawak more than 100 years ago. About 100 scientists, naturalists and Wallace's enthusiasts gathered from all over the world to present their newest findings.

The old government bungalow at Santubong, where Wallace wrote the famous "The Sarawak Law", a preamble to the Theory of Evolution, and Rajah's retreat at Mount

Serambu will be developed to attract visiting scientists and tourists.

Tan Sri Adenan says Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia and Malaysia, which make up the island of Borneo, have presented to the world the joint commitment to conserve and protect one of the most diverse natural ecosystems on earth. They form the largest contiguous tropical rainforest in South East Asia with reference to the island of Borneo.

The three countries affirm the importance of joint conservation initiatives to ensure the sustainable management of the 20 million hectares of vast, unbroken area of the forest that still cloak mountains, foothills and adjacent lowlands that stretch along the inland borders of Brunei, Kalimantan Indonesia and Sarawak and Sabah.

He says the State government has set aside about 2.1 million hectares as Sarawak's contribution to the Heart of Borneo's long-term objectives, under the Bali Declaration, to promote people's welfare and cooperation to ensure effective management of forest resources and conservation of a network of protected areas, productive forests and other sustainable land use.

The geography of Borneo has a mountain range all the way from Tanjung Datu to Sabah, which Brunei, Kalimantan Barat and Sarawak and Sabah want to preserve as the back bone of the island of Borneo.

He says the Heart of Borneo project is an extension to the existing government-driven, bilateral and multilateral collaborations, which have been implemented by the State government.

In other words, the Heart of Borneo's initiative is a rebranding of the existing conservation efforts.

For example, Sarawak has been working with Indonesia (Kalimantan Barat) in particular on two important trans-boundary biodiversity conservation projects funded by International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO), namely, Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary and Pulong Tau National Park areas.

He says the State government has endorsed the project implementation framework (PIF), which focuses on five key areas, namely, sustainable agricultural/land use, sustainable forest management;

conservation of biological diversity (including trans boundary Biodiversity Conservation Area networks), community-based rural poverty eradication and ecotourism based on Culture, Adventure and Nature (CAN).

The State government encourages all forest timber licensees within the Heart of Borneo areas to be certified under the Malaysian Timber Certification Scheme (MTCS) or any other equivalent certification to ensure compliance with sustainable forest management practices.

The Heart of Borneo (HoB) initiative can benefit the state by attracting more local and international collaboration, providing platform to promote Sarawak's effort in conservation and sustainable forest management; encouraging stakeholders cooperation through information sharing and implementation of joint activities and enhancing capacity building through collaborations.

Participation of local communities as co-partners in conservation management, initiated under the ITTO-supported projects in Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary and Pulong Tau National Park, will be further promoted and strengthened.

In this connection, a dialogue was held with the Forum of Indigenous People of Highlands of Borneo (FORMADAT) to discuss participation by local communities in the implementation of HoB initiatives.

He says the State government, which is very serious about conserving the natural resources, is prepared to work with international bodies and local communities and sponsor studies on ways to retain biological biodiversity.

The State government has taken proactive measures to monitor illegal logging in the Balai Ringin area by conducting routine preventive patrolling duty, aerial surveillance and field investigation.

Besides realising the importance of night patrolling, relevant agencies, namely, Polis DiRaja Malaysia (PDRM), Pasukan Gerak Am (PGA) Suruhanjaya Pencegahan Rasuah Malaysia (SPRM), Agensi Penguatkuasaan Maritim Malaysia (APMM) and Sarawak Forestry Corporation (SFC) are carrying out joint patrolling of the area.

He says the government also engages local communities by appointing members as honorary wildlife rangers.

Their role is to report any irregularity within their area of residence. Any complaints from the public will be attended to immediately.

It cannot be denied that the people do steal timber; hence continuous efforts have been made to strengthen supervisory and ragging powers by putting all the departments together so that surveillance and prevention can be more effective.

It might not be 100% effective, but efforts are being made to get as effective as possible.

Tan Sri Adenan says the management of Gunung Mulu National Park disposes solid wastes through practical means at its disposal. The organic refuse such as vegetable wastes and left over food are separated and collected by local workers as feed for the domestic animals.

Non-recyclable and biodegradable wastes are compressed and sent every four to six weeks to be disposed in the council's designated landfill in Marudi.

The sewerage at the park headquarters goes through a series of septic tanks through which black water will pass through sand filter before being dispersed into the forest.

Those at Camp 5, Clearwater Cave and Deer Cave have to go through the bio-cycle system and a series of pumps and tanks before being discharged as effluent. The solid residues from both systems are collected and also sent to the landfill in Marudi.

The Natural Resources Environment Board (NREB), since its establishment in 1994, has performed its multi-disciplinary roles well in facilitating and regulating development to ensure all activities comply with universal environmental standards.

For example, NREB has adopted the internationally recognized Environmental Impact Assessment or EIA as a mandatory requirement before any prescribed development activities can commence.

Nevertheless, environmental issues are increasingly becoming complex with the public becoming more conscious of them to ensure that the natural resources are sustainably managed and the environment are protected in the process of development.

Hence, NREB and the Federal Department of Environment (DOE) are tasked with greater challenges to ensure that the implementation of various mega and environmentally sensitive development projects, such as the development of hydroelectric power dams and Samalaju Industrial Park under the Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE) and other major land development comply with their high environmental standards.

Since early this year, NREB has been implementing the Environmental Audit process to further strengthen the environmental initiatives and, at the same time, encourage the development sectors to advocate Self Regulation to ensure better compliance to Terms and Approval Environmental Conditions imposed by environmental agencies.

The first batch of 17 participants from various disciplines and industries are undergoing an intensive 10-day Environmental Auditors training to help them to implement the process.

By then, they can register themselves with NREB as Independent Environmental Auditors.

All NREB officers have successfully undergone similar training and are competent to conduct environmental audit as and when required.

For example, DOE is enforcing the requirement for industries to install a Continuous Emission Monitoring System, which is an integrated system for the measurement and recording of gases, particulates and smoke (opacity) emitted from premises.

The industries are also accountable to provide DOE with an up-to-date inventory of scheduled wastes generated, treated and disposed off on a continuous basis.

This is done through the e-Consignment Note, which is the online monitoring and tracking system to monitor the handling of scheduled wastes from industries.

Besides, DOE, since the middle of 2007, has been implementing the EIA consultation registration scheme, where only qualified and registered consultants may carry out an EIA study. The scheme has been a regulatory requirement to ensure a good quality EIA report.

Subsequently, DOE, since 2010, has also made it compulsory for industries to conduct a Third Party Audit to evaluate the level of compliance of industries to EIA Approval Conditions given by DOE.

The programmes will be further intensified to enhance efforts of both NREB and DOE in organising Environmental Education and Awareness programmes with related agencies for various target groups.

Besides, the environmental awareness campaign for the public is being held through "Rakan Alam Sekitar" programme throughout the years.

Both NREB and DOE have established collaboration with stakeholders for a more effective implementation of environmental