



SARAWAK Biodiversity Centre, CEO, Dr. Rita Manurung (left) presents a souvenir as a token of appreciation to Professor Balbir Singh (right) after the talk yesterday afternoon. PHOTO: MARVIN KUDANG

SBC holds talk on Malaria

BY NATASHA JEE/ MARVIN KUDANG

KUCHING: Human knowlesi malaria cases have since been detected in almost all the countries in Southeast Asia and *Plasmodium knowlesi* is now recognised as the fifth species of *Plasmodium* causing human malaria.

Director of the Malaria Research Centre, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) Professor Balbir Singh said during a public awareness talk on The M&Ms: Malaria, Man, Monkeys and Mosquitoes at Sarawak Biodiversity Centre (SBC), Jalan Puncak Borneo, Semmengoh yesterday afternoon.

"There are about 665,000 to 1 million deaths every year and up to 2 people die every minute because of malaria," he said.

There are 4 types of species of *plasmodium* which are *P.falciparum*, *P. vivax*, *P. ovale*, and *P. malaria*. The *P. knowlesi* is a malaria parasite that naturally infects long-tailed and pig-tailed macaques.

"The *P. knowlesi* was shown to be infective to humans by blood

passage soon after it was first isolated from a long-tailed macaque in 1931."

He said that naturally-acquired human infections were thought to be extremely rare until a number of cases of the infection were reported in Sarawak in 2004.

"In Sarawak, from 2005 to 2009 there were 13 fatal cases reported, and in Sabah from 2007 to 2011 there were 9 fatal cases reported," he added.

Balbir said that the signs and symptoms of malaria included fever, chills, headache, muscle pain, vomiting, diarrhea, stomachache and loss of appetite.

"A person can get malaria through mosquito bites, blood transfusion and close contact with the person who has already been infected by the virus," he said.

He added that the people who were at risk of getting infected of the disease were farmers, hunters, army personnel and travelers who travel along the jungle.

"What the public can do to prevent the disease is to take a blood test, use mosquito nets and repellent," he said, adding the public need not worry as the disease is preventable and treatable.