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### State supports research, intellectual devt



INTERESTING: Adenan (second right) takes a closer look at the publications set up in the mini exhibition area after opening the Wallace 2013 international conference.

KUCHING: The state government will continue to support intellectual development by providing research facilities and grants to local institutions such as Universiti Sarawak Malaysia (Unimas).

Chief Minister Pehin Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud emphasised in his speech, read by minister in the Chief Minister's Office (Special Functions) Tan Sri Datuk Amar Adenan Satem, that Sarawak was committed to conserving the state's biodiversity .

"We need good and useful information to enable us to formulate effective conservation policies," he said before the opening ceremony of the Second International Conference on Alfred Russel Wallace: His Predecessor and Successor held at the Riverside Majestic Hotel yesterday.

"Therefore, I am happy to see that the promotion of research in the discipline of biogeography and biodiversity are among the objectives of this conference," he added.

Alfred Russel Wallace, an English naturalist, came up with unprecedented ideas in the understanding of biological diversity and organic evolution while in Sarawak exactly 158 years ago.

The biogeographical ideas originated by Wallace were topical to modern science and relevant to policy makers concerned with conservation.

Wallace was responsible for connecting Sarawak to the world in 1855 when he wrote his first major paper on evolution titled "On the law which has regulated the introduction of new species" which later became known as 'The Sarawak Law'.

Earlier on, external adviser to the conference Dato Sri Gathorne, Earl of Cranbrook, proposed that this conference also worked towards a complete collection of digital images of the type of specimens of animals discovered by Wallace in Sarawak.

"I recognised that the initial expense will not be small. However, I am certain that the institutions in the United Kingdom (UK) that hold the originals will be willing to find means to share the costs of digitisation," he said in his request to the state government to seriously consider the proposal.

The location of this resource, he added, would probably be placed at the Sarawak Museum, where it would be accessible by researchers and teachers of higher educational institutions as well as national and foreign visiting scientists.

"It will also be a permanent and invaluable resource in applied fields such as agriculture, forestry and wood processing, or medical and veterinary research into potential vectors."

This digital record, he pointed out, would be a fitting memorial for Wallace's dedication as a field collector in Sarawak, his first island destination and the place where he made some of his important discoveries.

Meanwhile, Unimas vice-chancellor Dato' Dr Mohamad Kadim Suadi said Unimas is well positioned to continue where Wallace left.

"We took advantage of our location in this biodiversity rich state and resolve to establish ourselves as the leading institution to educate the public, train human resource and conduct research in biodiversity, biogeography and speciation."

Kadim said Unimas had established the Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation (IBEC) and the Faculty of Resource Science and Technology (FRST) as founding faculties in 1993.

"The focus of research at IBEC and FRST is on biodiversity, environment, ecology, biogeography, evolution, speciation, and conservation – disciplines which early development can be attributed to Wallace," he added.

The Wallace 2013 was the second international event in Sarawak to honour the remarkable contribution of Wallace to science, biodiversity conservation and humanity.

The first event was held in 2005 to celebrate 158 years of his explorations in Sarawak.

This two-day conference brought together historians, natural scientists, ecologists, zoologists, botanists, palaeontologists, anthropologists, geologists, park managers, and other scholars of natural sciences to share their experiences on ecology, evolutions and resource management of the region.

About 80 delegates from Australia, Brunei, Germany, USA, UK, Switzerland, Singapore, Japan, the Philippines, India, Thailand and Pakistan joined the conference.

In conjunction with the conference, an official tour to Gunung Serambu, a Wallace collection locality, will be held tomorrow.

An expedition to Mount Santubong where Wallace collected and wrote his monumental paper, now referred as "Sarawak Law", will be organised between now and Nov 18.

The conference is jointly organised by Unimas' IBEC, Department of Sarawak Musuem, SFC and supported by Sarawak Convention Bureau (SCB).

Source: **The Borneo Post**