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Study on Imbak Canyon Ethno-Forestry

Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Haji Aman (right) in discussion with the outgoing consulate-general of Brunei to Kota Kinabalu Haji Daud Haji Mohd Tahir during a farewell call at Sri Gaya in Kota Kinabalu yesterday.



KOTA KINABALU: Efforts are being made through the partnership of Yayasan Sabah Group (YSG) and Petronas to study and document forest products and natural resources used by local communities surrounding the Imbak Canyon Conservation Area (ICCA).

The study will be carried out under the Imbak Canyon Ethno-Forestry Study with the launching to be held tomorrow (Wednesday) by State Tourism, Culture & Environment Minister Datuk Masidi Manjun.

According to Yayasan Sabah director Tan Sri Datu Khalil Datu Haji Jamalul, ICCA is unique compared to the other conservation areas under the purview of Yayasan Sabah Group.

Khalil added to date three scientific expeditions had been conducted in ICCA.

"Although the expeditions were conducted in a short period of time, the works carried out have revealed that the area has a high density of medicinal plants—a true pharmaceutical haven," he said.

"Hence, we see the need to conduct such study in identifying the medicinal plants used by the community surrounding ICCA. The study also aims to engage with the local medicine man in order to document the knowledge from their group about the usage of the medicinal plants."

Yayasan Sabah Group hopes to work with the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) and expertise from the relevant institutions/organisations to assist in the effort to ensure all medicinal values are recorded and all Intellectual Properties are properly recognised," he explained.

"Much work needs to be done to classify and document its usage especially as medicinal plants. It will take a comprehensive study to unveil the secrets that lie within the conservation area that is dubbed as a 'living pharmacy', and which may possibly hold the

cure to many of today's sickness," he added.

The in-depth social study and documentation will include collecting and documenting local knowledge on plants' usage (including plant's part, detail description of preparation of plants parts and user groups), distribution and management of all plants, species of interest, gathering of findings on the local's classification systems for plants and the environment (vegetation, soils, climates, geology, vegetation types, species diversity etc), the people (ethnic group, language, population size and distribution, migration, social groups, education etc) and the interactions between them (land-use systems, tenure systems and human disturbance).

The study will cover the three "mukim" in Tongod District, namely Karamuak, Tongod and Pinangah, consisting of 48 villages surrounding ICCA.

The study will be conducted in two parts. The first outing is a preliminary study which aims to collect information on the socio-cultural structure for every village and at the same time identify the medicine men/elders who can provide information related to ethno-forestry and medicinal plants.

Through the second outing, the researchers will interview the medicine man/elders identified in the preliminary study concerning their knowledge on the usage of medicinal plants.

Khalil said the study and documentation of forest products and natural resources used by the communities surrounding ICCA is in line with Imbak Canyon Conservation Area's positioning goals, i.e. to be a Centre of Learning for Indigenous Community in biodiversity conservation and for gene bank conservation and the exploration of pharmaceutical and biotechnological potentials.

"In the context of Imbak Canyon, the traditional medicinal practices among the communities are diminishing due to cultural changes implicated from the establishment of nearby hospital and village clinics, which also changes the perception of the communities on the traditional medicinal practices. Hence, researchers may need to spend more time with the local communities in the remote area to acquire ethno-medicinal information from the few people remaining as traditional practitioners," he elaborated.

The study is one of several programmes under the YSG and Petronas Imbak Canyon Conservation Partnership launched in June last year.

Through the collaboration, the national oil company is providing funding of RM6 million enabling YSG, together with other relevant agencies to carry out eight core programmes in ICCA.

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The programmes are Community Outreach, Public Awareness, Research, Capacity Building, Environmental Education, Ethno-Forestry Study as well as the formulation of a Management Plan and establishment of Imbak Canyon Studies Centre.

In conjunction with the launching, a one-day workshop on Accessing and Commercialising Biodiversity will also be held.

Through the workshop, YSG hopes to gain more knowledge not only with regard to practical ways in accessing and documenting traditional ecological knowledge but also related rules and regulations.

For further information on the workshop, interested participants can contact Rita Stuel-Galid at (088) 326 563. – PR