



THE villagers of Ba' medamot together with Len and his entourage of forestry staff.

A bridge in Ulu Baram

BARAM: A 32-metre long suspension bridge across the Sungai Kubaan was recently completed and declared open by Datuk Len Talif Salleh, Acting Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Planning and Resource Management and Director of Forests, on Dec 17.

Sg Kubaan is located in the watershed of the north-western boundary of the Pulong Tau National Park in the Ulu Baram.

The bridge was constructed under the community development programme of the Pulong Tau National Park project that is supported by the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO) and implemented by Forest Department Sarawak as the project's Executing Agency.

The project's main objectives are biodiversity conservation and community-based development.

Samling Strategic Corporation in Miri helped to transport the steel cables, cement and all other materials as well as personnel to the construction site.

Members of the construction team comprised forestry staff from headquarters in Kuching, and regional offices in Miri, Sibul, Limbang, Bario, Lawas and Ba'kelalan and seven Penans from the village of Ba' Medamot.

Another activity implemented at the same time was the upgrading of the 12-km long jungle trail from Bario to Ba' Medamot - a trail regularly

used by the Penan communities living outside the national park, and Kelabits and tourists from overseas.

The upgrading work involved widening of certain dangerous sections of the trail and replacing timber bridges across small streams.

In his speech, Len emphasised that the bridge was a symbol of cooperation between the government, ITTO, the timber industry and the local communities.

Recently, at the instigation of foreign NGOs who have no real intention to help, 17 so-called Penan communities declared over 160,000 hectares of forests in the Ulu Baram as Penan Peace Park.

In actual fact, it was only a small fraction of Penans who were being manipulated by the foreign NGOs to gain sympathy in their respective countries to raise funds.

Sadly, none of the money raised have been utilised to uplift the living standard of the Penan or to provide infrastructure facilities which could benefit them and other communities in the area.

In fact, these same NGOs groups, especially the so-called Bruno Manser Foundation is a traitor to the Penan community by denying them the option of being able to live a progressive life similar to other communities in the state.

They have done nothing to help the Penan community except to oppose any development that would benefit them.

On the other hand, the Forest Department, under the ITTO supported project, Pulong Tau National Park, has been helping the Penan communities living in the vicinity of the Park for the past two years.

Among the assistance rendered were providing gravity feed water supply and other basic amenities to Long Lobang and Long Sabai, providing training in fruit and vegetable planting to six Penan villages, including the supply of planting materials and tools and assisting 230 applicants from the Penan and other communities to apply for their birth certificates and MyKads.

Shoes, exercise books and pencils, tooth brush and soap have also been provided to the Penan students studying in Bario.

The department will continue to do whatever it can in the coming years to assist the Penan community and in the pipeline are projects such as extending the gravity feed water supply to Ba' Medamot and providing building materials for their houses.

A native himself, Len in his early years had the experience of roaming the jungle and collecting jungle produce for a livelihood. Thus, he can relate to the challenges faced by the Penans in their daily lives.

However, education provided by the government (he graduated with a BSc in Forestry) made him to what he is today.

The Bruno Manser Foundation is made up of people who were privileged to be born and raised in a country with modern facilities and amenities. They have a main agenda of raising funds for the benefits their organisation.

Based on his experiences, Len considers education as being crucial to one's success in life and urged the Penans to

seize the opportunity of sending their children to schools provided by the government.

A fine example is that of Damaris Panai, a Penan of Long Kevok. Due to her good results in the SPM, she received the Chief Minister's Special Award and was awarded a full scholarship by the Interhill Group to further her studies in accounting.



The completed suspension bridge at Ba' Medamot



Datuk Len Talif Salleh and Raja Libak, headman of Ba' Medamot, at the new bridge.