

Jabu blames Bruno for Penans' backwardness

By Philip Kiew

MIRI: The Penan community could have progressed faster without the negative influence and interference by Bruno Manser and foreign NGOs driven by their own self-interest.

Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Alfred Jabu said the consequences of their instigations were detrimental to the community.

"It should be a lesson learnt as Bruno Manser and the NGOs are nobody in their own country but came to Sarawak and make use of its weakest link in the Penans to collect funds from around the world," he said when officiating at the opening of a three-day Sarawak Penan Volunteers workshop at a hotel here yesterday.

He said Penan were left in the lurch as such NGOs had to justify the funds collected by capitalising on problems in other places, using Penans as their stepping stone.

"The Bruno Manser Fund (BMF) based in Switzerland made money by sensationalising the Penan issues through television and multimedia, in the pretext of helping Penans. And look who is making money... it's Bruno, not the Penans," he said.

The action of such NGOs, said Jabu, had tarnished the image of the country, and Sarawak in particular.

Pointing to the recent report by BMF alleging rape and abuse of Penan girls and



BEAUTIFUL PENAN MAT: Jabu (centre) flanked on his right by Assistant Minister of Infrastructure Development and Communication Lee Kim Shin and Ose admires a Penan mat presented to him as a souvenir.

women by loggers in the Baram, he said it failed to furnish details when police investigations were carried out.

"It is a great lie by BMF to the world."

Minister of Women, Family and Community Development Datuk Ng Yen Yen even directed officers to come to Sarawak to investigate the allegation, and investigations by the police showed that there was no proof of BMF's allegations.

Jabu said the money spent in the expensive and extensive investigations could have been better spent on helping the community.

"The federal and state governments have been working hard to address the rural development issues, and the sheer remoteness of the Penan settlements in the Baram, Limbang and Belaga has made it a

difficult task."

Jabu said various development programmes designed to help the Penans had been drawn up to enable them to progress with other communities, be it in education, health and medical care, to name a few.

Among them were basic infrastructure and telecommunication centres such as e-jekitan at Long Jekitan under the Malaysian Multimedia Communication Commission, which was carried out by Maxis using the VSAT concept.

A similar project had been earmarked for Long Beruang and works on the community hall was now underway, and would be completed in two months' time.

Jabu said the government had steadfastly reached out to the Penan community as they were lagging behind others, and he has personally seen a dramatic change in

attitude towards education and progress.

He pointed to the previously staunch opposition to government initiatives in some Penan settlements, which had been replaced by their acceptance after they realised that only the government and not foreign NGOs could help them.

This has been partly attributed to the dedication of Penan volunteers in overseeing the development programmes at the respective locations and assisting their fellow tribesmen.

Earlier, on Miri Resident Datu Ose Murang said the workshop served as a refresher course for the 35 Penan volunteers serving in Belaga, Limbang and Baram districts, reports of work carried out and plans in the pipeline in the respective areas.