

**Bruno-Manser-Fonds**  
Association for the peoples of the rain forest



BMF, Heuberg 25, CH-4051 Basel, Switzerland

# News from Sarawak

Compiled by Roger Graf

## Temporary halt to Bakun Dam

Zurich/Kuala Lumpur, November 1997

The construction of the 2400 megawatt dam has been stopped for the time being for economic reasons. According to an announcement by Anwar Ibrahim, the Malaysian Vice President, certain large-scale projects in Malaysia, including the Bakun Dam, are being postponed for at least two years. The enormous decline in the value of the Malaysian currency has added substantially to the project's costs. According to press reports, Ekran, the Malaysian contracting agent, has canceled the contract with ABB (the Swiss-Swedish Asean Brown Boveri group) for the construction of the power plant. ABB has denied this, stating that negotiations are still in progress.

## Wood plantations instead of forests

Kuala Lumpur/Kuching, November 1997  
(«Tigerpaper»/Perkasa)

The Malaysian Ministry of Economic Affairs has announced an increase in wood plantations throughout Malaysia. At present there are about 692 km<sup>2</sup> in West Malaysia (peninsula) and 1127 km<sup>2</sup> and 100 km<sup>2</sup> in each of the two federal states on Borneo, Sabah and Sarawak. Annually, Malaysia has produced some 35 million m<sup>3</sup> of wood from natural forests. The number will drop to 26 million m<sup>3</sup> by 2010. Malaysia's sawmills have a total production capacity of 27 million m<sup>3</sup>. Additional wood from plantations is thus needed to satisfy rising demand. In the past,

most of the wood plantations were established by the state. More participation from private industry is anticipated in the future. YAB Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Dr. Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud, Sarawak's Chief Minister, has announced that "a part" of the 64,000 km<sup>2</sup> forest reserve will be declassified so that new plantations of trees can be cultivated.

## Sarawak to become the largest producer of cellulose

Bintulu, May 25, 1997 («The Star»)

By the turn of the century, Sarawak will become the world's largest producer of cellulose. That is at least what Taib Mahmud, Sarawak's Chief Minister, announced at the ceremony marking the start of construction of "Borneo Pulp and Paper Sdn Bhd," a new 2.5 billion Ringgit (ca. US\$ 600 million) cellulose factory. The factory is in Ulu Tatau, not far from Bintulu. The project is a joint venture between the Sarawak Timber Industry Development Corporation and the Asia Pulp & Paper Company Ltd. Taib Mahmud has stated that the project will be very influential in the socio-economic development of Sarawak. He was quoted in "The Star" as saying "Such projects could mean a fortune for the people [meaning the indigenous peoples – editorial note] who have lived in poverty for generations." The government will plant rapidly growing trees over an area of some 2000 km<sup>2</sup> to supply the paper factory. The trees will supposedly grow five times faster than forest trees. The factory will start production in 1999 and have an initial annual production of 750,000 tons of cellulose.



**The only "sustainable" aspect of Malaysian forestry is its destruction. How else can it be explained that, despite "sustainable development," the forests are now being replaced by wood plantations?**

**Photo: Aila Ziegler**

# News from Sarawak

## Two Penan – news from summer 1997

(Translation from the Penan language by Bruno Manser)

### Like a discarded child

Now we are sitting like long-tailed macaques on the branches of felled meranti trees. How many times have we spoken with

since 1962 Malaysia. But before there was any kind of government in Sarawak, we Penan were living in the forest. There were also difficulties in earlier times, but none like those today with the timber industry. The timber companies have come without asking us. If we tried to keep them out, they replied by saying "Whether you like it or not, we are going into your forest." There is no represen-



Unequal struggle in the Penan area.  
Photo: Nigel Dickinson

the Company? They simply don't listen. If a wild boar or a stag is hit with an arrow, they have no telephone to call for help. The same applies to us as Penan in the remote mountainous regions. The Company wanted to give us rice and money. We did not accept it. We still have a small amount of forest. If we want to defend it, the police come and shoot around in the area with their "pom-pom-pom." "Kusui," a Chinese forestry entrepreneur, even fired his gun between us! We have become like a rejected child, groping its way at night in the darkness and without light. We are seeking the way of life. All of us – children, women, fathers and mothers – are having a difficult time. The Company is working in the reservations on the Magoh and Adang Rivers which have been promised to us. And down in the valley, they want to plant oil palms. Then there will not be a single tree left, not even one as thick as a finger. There will not even be enough for firewood.

*Gerawet Megut (nomad in Magoh)*

### A car in exchange for the forest?

In earlier times, we Penan lived with flints and tinder made from lesser palms and clothed ourselves with skins and bast. The Sultan of Brunei Darussalam was the first to administer Sarawak, then the Brooke government, the Japanese, the English Crown and

tative of the government who comes to straighten out the difficulties. Only the military and police to prevent us from defending our land and to silence us. The timber company wanted to give me a car in exchange for the forest. I rejected it. If the forest is destroyed and I find no more food, what should I do with a car? Eat it? And if I need the car, and tomorrow it no longer works, what should I do about it? Why should I use the car to bring my people down to the cities in the valley? So that they can argue and steal? How many times have I been in Marudi, Miri and Kuching without any money? What good does it do me to see all of these things? The Company did not buy my heart when others were taking thousands of Ringgit. In their eyes, we are fools. But the money, regardless of how much, will one day be used up. However if we work in our forest, which is still a primeval forest, we will be able to live and have children because there is enough food. That is our heart. How many times have I spoken with the government? But until now, we have not been respected. Do not forget us. We are hoping for your help!

*Penghulu James, Long Lamai (official representative of the Penan people in Ulu Baram)*

# News from Malaysia

## Malaysian timber companies abroad

Compiled by Roger Graf

### Innovest Bhd in Congo-Brazzaville

In September 1997, the Malaysian company Innovest Bhd began logging in a 3360 km<sup>2</sup> concession in the southwest of Congo-Brazzaville. It plans to cut 100,000 m<sup>3</sup> of timber each year. 92% of the shares of the Congolese subsidiary Innovest Congo SA belong to the Malaysian parent company, 5% to the government of Mossendjo (Congo) and 3% to an unknown investment holding.

### Timbermaster Industries Bhd in Gabun

Timbermaster Industries Bhd has purchased another timber concession of 10,000 km<sup>2</sup> in one of Gabun's primeval forests. The area is on the Okano River, directly adjacent to an already existing concession of 2200 km<sup>2</sup>. 300,000 m<sup>3</sup> of timber, especially okoumé and ozigo, will be cut

annually. The company employs 270 workers and has 62 bulldozers at its disposal. Timbermaster is expecting to earn between \$ 120 and \$ 150 per cubic meter of wood and is figuring with an annual net profit of \$ 9 million.

### Rimbunan Hijau and WTK in Brazil

Rimbunan Hijau, the Malaysian timber giant, is intending to start operations in Brazil. According to newspaper reports, the company wants to buy two Brazilian timber companies in the state of Para. Costs are rumored to be at US\$ 40 million. Negotiations are in progress according to an announcement made to the press in June 1997 by the company's director, Datuk Tiong Hiew King. At the time of our going to press (November 15, 1997), it was not yet known if Rimbunan Hijau had finalized the deal. According to a statement by the Malaysian ambassador to Brazil, the WTK company has bought a 3000 km<sup>2</sup> concession and a sawmill in a rain-forest area between the Jurna and Purus Rivers in the state of Amazonas.

### Malaysian officials dismiss accusations

Kuala Lumpur, June 27, 1997 (The Star)

Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has dismissed accusations that Malaysian officials and timber companies are threatening the Amazonian rain forest. "We have nothing to fear because we are certain that the accusations are unfounded," the minister was quoted as saying. The criticism is of a purely political and economic nature. When asked why Malaysian timber companies are repeatedly being criticized, the Minister replied by saying "as we are logging in many countries, it is only natural that we are constantly being controlled." The Malaysian ambassador to Brazil, Datuk Zainal Zain, expressed himself somewhat more harshly. "We are being accused of ruining the trees, and described as monsters who have come to destroy the forests of the Amazon. Please show us a single tree which has been sawed down by a Malaysian timber company." The ambassador accused the rich Western nations, which see the Amazon as nothing more than a backyard to be exploited, of instigating the campaign against Malaysia. These countries feel threatened by the superiority and advanced technology of the Malaysian timber companies.



**The development of rain forest resources in Central Africa opens the door to poachers.**

**Photo: WSPA**

# Indonesia

**“New York Times” calls for boycott of tropical timber and introduction of “country of origin” labelling laws for timber.**

September 27, 1997

Asia’s Forest Disaster

The thick smoke spreading throughout Southeast Asia apparently claimed 234 more lives on Friday, when an Indonesian airliner lost its way in the haze and crashed.

The smoke, coming from forest fires on the Indonesian island of Sumatra and the Indonesian part of Borneo, now blankets Singapore, Brunei and parts of Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand.

The fires are accelerated by drought but were set by man. In its headlong rush to cut down its timber and sell it, Asia has saddled itself with the worst deforestation problem of any continent.

Environmentalists have long warned of the consequences. Asian leaders have dismissed the critics as subversives inspired by the West to try to stop Southeast Asia’s dazzling economic growth. But while previous fires have not persuaded governments to halt deforestation, Asia’s leaders should now realize that growth is fleeting when based on the wanton destruction of natural resources.

The Indonesian Government has attributed previous fires to farmers clearing their land for crops. This time, because the fires have been burning for months and satellite data is being made public, the Government has been forced to acknowledge that the fires coincide mainly with areas of commercial logging on Borneo and Sumatra.

Indigenous farmers use the same environmentally sound farming methods they have for centuries, rotating between plots of family land.

The problem is the logging companies, which often show up unannounced, cut the trees, burn the stumps and set up plantations of oil palms or eucalyptus and acacia trees for paper and pulp – usually all without compensating the farmers.

To compound the tragedy, the precious tropical hardwood is then turned into virtual garbage.

Most of it is milled into plywood and particle board, largely used in Japanese construction sites as a disposable mold for concrete.

About 10 percent of Indonesia’s plywood



**Fighting the smog in Southeast Asia.**

**Photo: Reuters**

comes to North America, where it is used in construction and cheap shelving.

The export of logs is illegal in Indonesia, so they are milled first. The plywood trade is a cartel controlled by Mohamad (Bob) Hasan, a billionaire who is President Suharto’s golf partner. Though the Government has vowed to prosecute the companies that set the fires, the record is not promising. Loggers can pay local forestry officials to look the other way, and powerful friends of the Suharto family have remarkably few legal problems.

Indonesia is not alone. Deforestation is more pronounced on the Malaysian part of Borneo, and is widespread in Cambodia, Thailand and other countries. In Indonesia, however, the devastation of commercial logging is compounded by the Government’s policy of subsidizing migration, which until 1986 was supported by the World Bank.

Farmers from the crowded island of Java are encouraged to move to the forests of Borneo and Sumatra.

Unfortunately, they bring their old techniques, which do not work outside Java’s rich volcanic soil and are eating up the forest.

Some good can come of these tragic fires if they persuade Southeast Asia and the nations that import their products to take forest protection seriously. The United States should begin by banning plywood made of tropical hardwood, or requiring country-of-origin labeling on wood products so consumers can refuse to buy them. Japan, often the buyer of products created by ruinous environmental practices, also needs to rethink its import policies. In the end, however, Southeast Asia’s environmental practices will not greatly improve until corruption and authoritarianism diminish. There is too much money to be made by powerful people, and too little attention paid to those groups trying to bring sanity to reckless growth.

# Speaking of wood

Compiled by Roger Graf

## In praise!

Since our last newsletter of September 1997, we have received reports from the Swiss communities of Feldis/Veulden GR, Gossau ZH, Lugaggia TI and Lutzenberg AR that they are **renouncing the use of tropical woods** in community buildings. In France, the city of Lille and the northern region of Pas de Calais have said they would no longer use tropical woods. The city of Bordeaux has decided to use pine instead of tropical wood for the construction of a promenade along the Garonne River.



**Caricature: Tagesanzeiger**  
**December 17, 1996**

The English B & Q Do-it-Yourself chain is already selling 10% of its lumber range with the new FSC eco label. This certificate is being furthered and co-sponsored by environmental organizations such as Greenpeace and WWF. Migros is going in the same direction and, as a founding member of the **"WWF Wood Group,"** has promised to deal only in woods from sustainable production. According to the agreement, the share of FSC woods will reach 100% in the do-it-yourself sector within five years, and 70% in the Micasa furniture sector. As of 2005, Migros will procure only FSC woods for the above-mentioned areas. In addition to Migros, the WWF Wood Group, founded in Zurich-Rüschlikon on September 16, 1997, has been joined by seven other companies from the wood industry including manufacturers of furniture and musical instruments. Members have made a commitment not only to FSC certification, but also to declaring the origin of all

woods, and in general to the ecological improvement of the range of woods according to a four-tiered list of priorities. It is headed by FSC certified timber from Switzerland and bordering regions. FSC certified timber from Europe has second priority. Third priority is accorded to noncertified lumber from Switzerland and bordering regions, and fourth to noncertified wood from Europe and to FSC timber from other parts of the world. Noncertified wood from Switzerland thus has a better ranking than FSC tropical woods or FSC timber from Canada and Siberia. Although the priority list is unique worldwide, the WWF Wood Groups in other countries generally give preference to FSC timber over noncertified local timber. BMF fully supports the Swiss version and congratulates Migros and the other companies for their exemplary step.

The complaint lodged against the certification of a logging concession in the Lopé Reservation of Gabon has been approved by the FSC. The FSC certificate granted to the **Isoroy/Leroy company** for okoumé wood was suspended. Four environmental organizations have lodged a complaint at FSC International headquarters against the sloppy certification practice of **SGS Forestry (Oxford)**, a subsidiary of the Geneva-based Société Générale de Surveillances SA. Management plans were lacking, and consultations with local environmental groups and organizations active in social areas, as required for the FSC eco label, were insufficient. SGS Forestry must now obtain the missing papers, provide information on the certification criteria which was used, cover all costs resulting from the appellate procedure, and SGS certifiers may only resume their forthcoming work with the participation of FSC experts. The entire affair is extremely embarrassing for SGS as the company is usually known for its credibility and reliability.

**A motion for the mandatory labeling** of wood and wood products was submitted by Swiss National Councilor Christoph Eymann in the fall session of Parliament. Eymann was amazed that, in spite of the promises of certain timber groups at the time of the first vote on a declaration in 1994, little has happened [except in the case of Migros – editorial note]. Nor does Eymann understand why something which was possible for meat and meat products in the shortest amount of time, is so difficult in the case of wood.

# Speaking of wood

## With disdain!

The September newsletter included a description of the iroko benches which are in use at new bus stops of **the public transportation system in Lausanne**. The Allgemeine Plakatgesellschaft (SGA), which is responsible for them, complained in a letter to BMF about our "lack of fair play." We should have informed the company in advance about our letter campaign! The Director, Bernard Develey, has pushed the blame onto the city administration of Lausanne, and especially on the architects involved. A test was made with oak for a period of a year but "unfortunately" it was not successful. The allegedly poor condition of the oak benches after only one year "regretfully" led to the fact that in the end tropical wood was chosen. As oak is an exceptionally durable wood, and the benches in the bus stops in Lausanne are sheltered by roofs, the arguments of the SGA seem to us to be totally implausible. Kindly write once again, in French, German or even in English, and request the results of the "Lausanne study."

Address: SGA, Mr. Bernard Develey,  
Case postale 1395, CH-1001 Lausanne,  
(fax 021 644 24 25)

Unfortunately, the **Swiss Federal Railways** are also not setting a good example.



Our backsides are still resting on benches made out of tropical wood, even in the enclosed waiting rooms of one of the Zurich subway stations. Beech or ash would have been absolutely adequate in such a case. Kindly write a postcard to the headquarters of the Swiss Federal Railways with a note demanding that this absurdity finally come to an end.

Address: Generaldirektion SBB  
Hochschulstrasse 6  
CH-3030 Bern  
(fax 031 220 28 91)

On October 14, 1997, just two days before the founding of the WWF Wood Group (see "In praise"), the **Swiss Forestry Association** launched its own eco label. The so-called "Q Label Swiss Quality" is supposed to guarantee compliance with Swiss Forestry Regulations. The goal is a universal coverage for all of Switzerland. The "Q Label" is actually nothing more than a voluntary indication of origin and has unmasked itself as a cheap strategy of avertion. The forestry label is meant to prematurely torpedo the efforts of environmental organizations toward a certification of Swiss forests according to the stricter FSC criteria.

According to an article which appeared in the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" on October 11, 1997, even official data indicate that no less than 80% of the logging and wood trade in the **Amazon** are illegal. And only 6.5% of the fines levied are actually paid. This is in good part due to rampant corruption.

## Benches made from tropical wood in Arth-Goldau.

Photo: Bruno Manser

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# Activities

## **Stop the use of plundered timber in government offices and public buildings!**

By Roger Graf and John Künzli

BMF has been waiting for a quite a while. Now the time has come for a long overdue campaign. We are setting our sights high with the intention of convincing all of the 2942 communities in Switzerland and the 11 communities in Liechtenstein that they should distance themselves from the use of "plundered" timber in public buildings and procurement programs. 40 communities (including the state and city of Basel), representing a population of 1.5 million or 20% of the Swiss population, have already renounced the use of wood from overexploitation. Much of the preparatory work for our campaign was accomplished at the outset. The city of Zurich published exemplary guidelines, the community of Fällanden ZH provided us with the minutes of the city council meeting, and the canton of Appenzell AR printed a small advisory brochure. This informative material, which was already available, was ideally suited for our campaign. We therefore had all three documents translated into the four official languages of Switzerland and then published. BMF has organized a press conference in Bern on November 20, 1997. Ueli Widmer (member of the Appenzell AR cantonal governing council), Remo Gysin (National Councillor from the canton of Basel-Stadt), Maurice Egger (city official from Fribourg), Claude-Alain Vuille (forester) a Penan woman and Bruno Manser talked with the media about our publications and the campaign. On the same day, ads appeared in some of the daily newspapers in all of Switzerland's four language regions to increase awareness of the matter. Those communities in Switzerland and Liechtenstein which are still lacking will receive information from our office and be asked to incorporate the necessary guidelines into community regulations. We are hoping that as many communities as possible will participate, and that Switzerland will renounce the use of plundered woods as soon as possible, at least in government offices and on the community level.

We are dependent on you, our readers, for an even greater success. On the one hand, because many communities still need a push.

Please telephone your own community officials in the coming days. Ask to talk with someone from the city council and ask if the matter is on the agenda or if a decision has already been taken. Please let us know at BMF, or if necessary ask us for further help. Our office is open on weekdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

On the other hand we are still lacking Sfr 14,000.- which we have temporarily set aside from the regular BMF budget. We would thus be exceptionally grateful for contributions earmarked for the campaign. Please note "Plundered Timber Campaign" on your checks or payments.

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**Alex, a typical farming dog from the canton of Bern, is using ecological means to transport 2910 envelopes to the main post office in Bern.**

**Photo: Stephan Engler**