

Hoping UMS will gain entry to EU scheme

By Larry Ralon

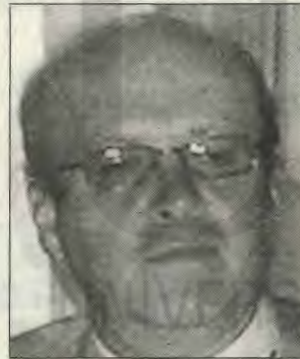
KOTA KINABALU: The Head of the EU Commission delegation to Malaysia, Thierry Rommel, hoped the recent commitment of EU grants through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to six more Sabah forest communities will help Sabah eradicate poverty.

He said the grants, managed by the UNDP office in Malaysia, are meant to empower the communities economically, help them improve their livelihood in a sustainable way and effectively put local communities at the heart of sustainable community forestry.

"The EU is aware of the fact that while Malaysia has been successful in slashing the nationwide rate of poverty incidence to less than five per cent, Sabah has actually a rate of poverty incidence in excess of 20 per cent," he said.

Besides the grants, there was also a simultaneous signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the UNDP and Sabah Forestry Department that sets the stage for a much stronger collaboration between the agencies of the State Government, local communities and funding partners to promote the conservation, management and sustainable development of the Sabah forests.

"It is the EU's hope that down the line, the successful implementation of those projects and of the partnership with the Sabah Forestry Department will convince the State Government and civil society that such projects must be replicated on a much grander scale in Sabah, for the benefit of Sabah," he said.



Rommel

On higher education cooperation which is given primary importance by both the EU and Malaysia, Rommel said although it is sad that Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) is not among the eight public and two private Malaysian universities that benefit from the EU's Asia Link programme, UMS is now preparing to submit a project proposal in partnership with some EU-based universities.

Asia Link is one of the two EU programmes for cooperation in the field of higher education. The other is the Erasmus Mundus, which is intended to enable students from around the world to engage in postgraduate studies in European universities.

Eighty Malaysian students are already or about to depart for Europe this September with an Erasmus Mundus scholarship, that cover their tuition fees and living expenses.

"Unfortunately, although the EC Delegation has made considerable efforts to promote this programme, including the case of Sabah with Yayasan Sabah, only two of the students selected for the scholarship are from the university of Sabah...this is a disappointing outcome which must lead to a reflection on how Sabah could do better, much better," said Rommel.

On the area of research, Rommel said Sabah-based researchers should take a closer look at how the EU-funded research programme can not only support their research but also link up Sabah-based research with EU-based research institutions and networks, many of which are world famous and would be ideal partners for Sabah's future biotechnology-based industry.