Govts' support crucial for Heart of Borneo

CONSERVATION sustainable development are two sides of the same coin and neither happens in isolation, Datuk Dr Mikaail Kavanagh, told 250 participants of an international conference in Kota Kinabalu on Tuesday.

He added that this is as true for Borneo as it is anywhere else in the world.

The day-long conference, with the theme, "Discover Borneo", was organized by Yaysan Sabah in conjunction with the official launching of the k@Borneo portal by Chief Minister Datuk Musa Aman, with the view to highlight the importance of information to promote Borneo.

Dr Mikaail set the tone for the conference by saying in his keynote address that information, integration and participation are "critical components" for the Heart of Borneo (HoB), just as they are in any other conservation initiative.

address The keynote speaker, who settled in Malaysia in 1978 and embarked on a 25-year career with WWF-Malaysia, now serves as Special Advisor to the WWF International's support for HoB initiative.

Biggest on the planet Dr Mikaail noted that the

HoB is one of the biggest conservation programmes on the planet, and that it illustrates the growth over a decade of an audacious, almost outrageous, conservation idea.

With the HoB covering a total area of over 200,000 sq km, he said its size is about 90% of United Kingdom, 65% of the whole Malaysian Federation, and 300 times the size of Singapore.

He said that on the one hand, the world's tropical forests are generally acknowledged to be global treasure houses of biodiversity on the other hand, human pressures are threatening their very survival by clearing and over harvesting them.

"Plus, there is fragmenting of what is left into non-viable patchworksofsmallareasthat rapidly decline in species composition and ecological functioning."

For conservation to succeed, Dr. Mikaail stressed, very large blocks (of forests) need

to be protected. He said this was the initial and simple idea that gave birth to the Heart of Borneo

conservation programme.

"But the reality is that the forests have always provided many goods and services for the local communities who have at the same time adapted modern economic development with all its costs and benefits." He invited conference

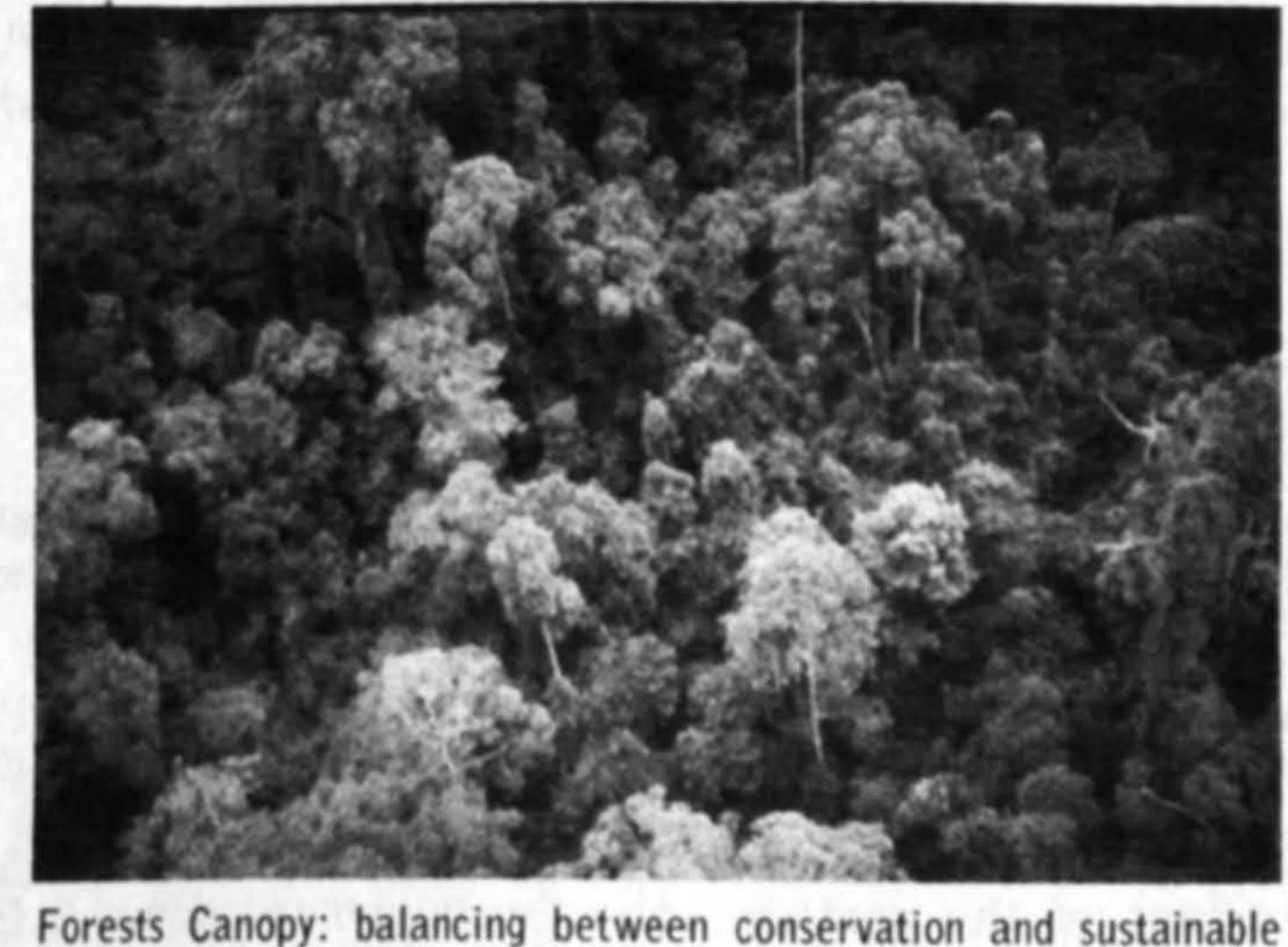
participants to take note that HoB is not a proposal for a lock away of the whole area under total protection as a giant park.

"Rather, it is a proposal for a core of total protection, set in a connecting buffer zone of sustainable human use."

Very different conditions Dr Mikaail pointed out that

HoB involves three different countries of Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia and Malaysia and that very different conditions apply in different parts of a landscape.

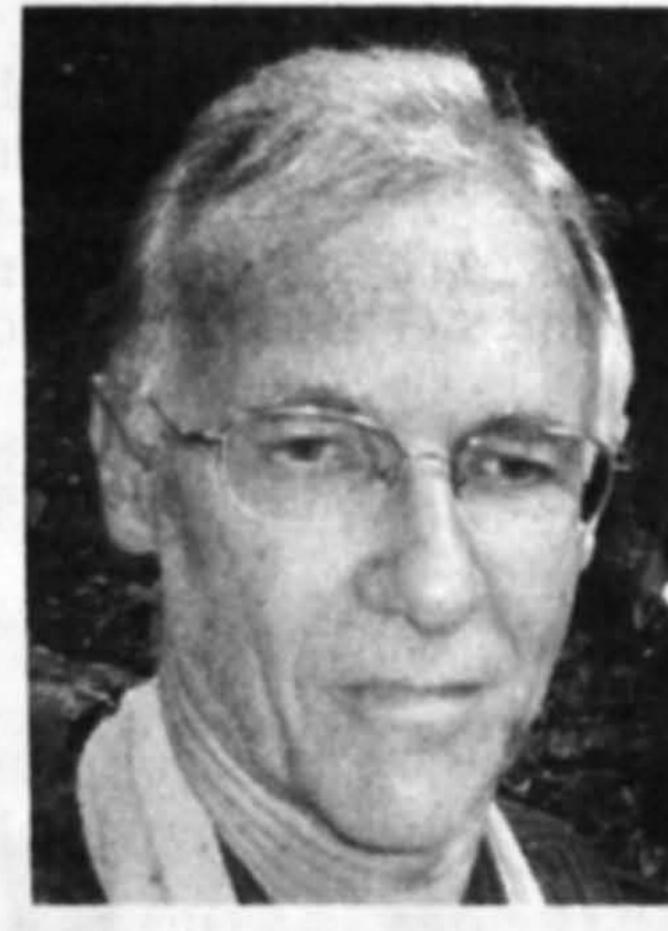
"This requires great national commitment. including finding efficient ways of coordinating the intergovernmental, trilateral



development of Borneo Island.

No other government department has done as well as the Forestry Department and due credit goes to its Director, Datuk Sam Mannan and many of his good officers.

Dr Junaidi Payne, Senior Technical Advisor with WWF-Malaysia.



Dr Junaidi Payne

effort."

In his opinion, the interest, encouragement and support that HoB has received from the governments of the three Bornean countries "is key to generating widespread support that put HoB past the tipping point". He gave a brief account of

major actions jointly taken by the three governments since the declaration of the HoB initiative was officially endorsed in Bali, on Feb. 12, 2007.

Tan Sri Datu Khalil Datu Hj Jamalul, the Director of Yayasan Sabah, was on hand to welcome the panel of seven speakers and participants at the opening session. Chairman of the conference,

held at the mini theatre of Menara Tun Mustapha, at Likas, was Datuk Dr Abdul Latiff Mohamad, the Emeritus Professor of the Faculty of Science and Technology, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). After the opening session,

all participants were invited to attend the opening ceremony of k@borneo portal at the main auditorium by the chief minister, before returning in the afternoon for the presentation of papers. Dr Junaidi Payne, a

conservation specialist who is attached to WWF-Malaysia as senior technical advisor for its Borneo programme, spoke on the "Trends in Generating Conservation Information in Sabah". He found that the

availability of good spatial information, "a big weakness" and that there are no clear trends for generating conservation information in Sabah.

However, Payne, who has been living in Sabah since 1979, noted that the availability of printed materials "is significant" in the state and gave examples of



Dr Mikaail

the "excellent of some compilations" of publications. Outstanding work

He made special mention of the annual reports of the Sabah Forestry Department, saying that they were outstanding. on time, and comprehensive in contents.

"No other government department has done as well as the Forestry Department and due credit goes to its Director, Datuk Sam Mannan and many of his good officers."

Among the outstanding publications he highlighted are: Tree Flora of Sabah and Sarawak; Kinabalu – Summit of Borneo; Maliau Basin -Sabah's Lost World; the 2008 annual report of Sabah Forestry Department; and A Field Guide to the Frogs of Borneo.

Payne, a biologist and an author of many books related to conservation including one on the Orang Utans, spoke of his experience in finding reliable information. Among the major sources of

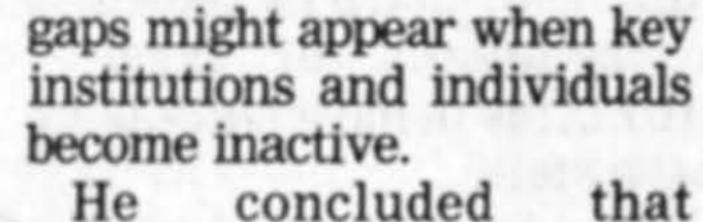
information he listed are: world wide webs (www), through the Internet; public libraries: universities; government departments and agencies; bookshops and networking colleagues. Giving each of these

categories a rating from one to 10, he placed the www at the top with a score of 10. bookshops and networking colleagues at 5, government agencies at only 2; whilst libraries public and universities are at the bottom rank of 1. Some weaknesses the

Payne discussed

implications these of weaknesses in generating reliable and up-to-date information on Borneo. He advocates the wider use of the www through Internet,

stressed the need to encourage and facilitate individual researchers, and warned that



"something very major needs to happen" in order to fulfill the unfulfilled promise of digital mapping in Borneo.

Dr Glen Reynolds, Director of the South-east Asia Rainforest Research Programme (SEARRP) of the Royal Society, presented a paper on "Current Efforts in Centralizing Information in Various Parts of Borneo".

He said the Royal Society, SEARR through the programme, has put in place a series of strategic research projects that would address the major issues facing tropical forests in the context of change in climate and land use.

This, he said, is done in collaboration with Royal Society's key partners in Sabah, particularly Yayasan Sabah, the Sabah Forestry Department, the management committees of the Danum Valley and Maliau Basin.

A regional hub

"It is our hope that these projects will collectively form a regional hub for ecosystem research and provide opportunities to rationalize collection data and information sharing not just on Borneo, but across the tropics."

Dr. Glennoted that the work of the Society has been built upon its 25-year history of research at Danum Valley. He nowservesasaseniorscientist at the field centre there, having started work on the SEARR programme since 2000.

Pugh-Dr Jacqueline Kitingan, ethnomusicologist holding the Kadazandusun Chair at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), made a presentation on the "Importance of collating of Traditional Knowledge in Sustainable Transforming Rural Indigenous People of Borneo".

She holds the view that Borneo societies are rich in traditional knowledge.

"Although undergoing culture change and social transformation, people should be able to access their traditional land and environment as well as their history, intangible cultural heritage and other traditional system of knowledge."

For future generations Dr. Jacqueline, who is an

associate professor in UMS's School of Social Science, told conference participants that the systematic collation, documentation and preservation of data are essential for access by future generations. She also stressed the

importance of indigenous languages and the need for digitalization of recorded data, for genetic banks, and that copyright and intellectual property rights must be maintained. Touching on challenges, she

said the destruction of the environment leads to the disruption of traditional socioeconomic systems, the loss of indigenous pharmacopoeia, and the loss of resources for material culture. In cases related to the destruction of historical sites

and monuments, she gave the example of the Liwagu dam, and the proposed Buayandam. As for challenges within the communities, Dr Jacqueline,

who is also an Adjunct Research Fellow Anthropology in the School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University, Australia, said these include the demise of traditional experts. Other such challenges are, entrance of new media and ignorance of the younger generations, she added. Prior to joining Universiti

Malaysia Sabah, Jacqueline worked for many years as music director cum cultural research officer in Sabah's Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, and was a research affiliate of the Sabah Museum.



Prof Emeritus Abdul Latiff Mohamad (far right), Conference chairman, with the panel of seven speakers on his left at the Borneo International Conference on 'Discover Borneo' in Kota Kinabalu last Tuesday.