Forestry education a necessity

Fung Khung Ming, Assistant Manager of Borneo Timber Sdn Bhd, a holder of State-owned Forest Management Unit (FMU), said: “We can provide you with new human resources.” He employs them, too.

Winning painting for the occasion.

DE: Still recruiting?
Fung: Yes, we are still recruiting graduates from UMS.
DE: Obviously you want to accomplish something through them, what kind of skills and knowledge are you looking for?
Fung: It’s like this. If you can get people from a forestry background, I don’t need to train them because they have the basic knowledge already. All I have to do is train them in management skills. I don’t need to train their technical skills because the university has done it already. We don’t need to reinvent the wheel. That saves me a lot of time and money and time is money.

DE: Are you saying a university like UMS with a robust Forestry degree programme (formulated by GTZ - German Agency for Technical Co-operation) is important?
Fung: Yes, UMS is the only university in Sabah with a Forestry degree programme and we need to cooperate with universities. The reason is we need to do R&D but we do not have the expertise in this area. So all these professors and lecturers (eg. Dr Berhaman, Dr Maycock, Prof Phua) can help us. As a timber company, we need to think about the future. We do not have the expertise to think for the future but we have the lecturers and professors at the university (UMS) (to help us think) for the future.

DE: So you are saying these guys are still relevant, not what cynics call mere ivory towers?
Fung: Of course, all of them are relevant.

DE: Is that why you are here the whole day on UMS World Forestry Day celebrations and that’s why you are supporting the event financially?
Fung: We are always supporting them but they are always supporting us. We have two groups, seven UMS students who are working in our camp now. They are doing two research projects. Another group is coming next month from another faculty.

Forestry don: We need each other
So, we have established one thing. Fung regards the existence of a UMS Forestry faculty as positive.

An intellectual asset close at hand but it’s symbolic, a real necessity.

Pert-aulted Aussie Dr Colin Maycock, Associate Professor of Forest Ecology, acknowledged this fact, arguing it’s near impossible to teach forestry without the help of timber production companies.

“Bornean timber has a history of supporting forestry education at UMS,” he said.

“For teaching forest management and forest engineering courses, you really need to go to and actually see a production forest. You can’t learn about road construction, bridge construction and all that stuff and these guys (like Fung) are doing that for a living so we usually need to take our students up there to see and Bornean Timber has been very supportive in these things,”

For the academic thing we are doing the commercial thing. We have to bring them together.

DE: What are you trying to say?
Fung: I am saying these are the people (forestry professors, lecturers and their graduates) who help us.
DE: You found this to be the reality, the truth?
Fung: This has always been the truth.

DE: OK, you are saying their brains are working with ours? Need-based necessity.
Fung: Of course, they are doing the academic thing we are doing the commercial thing. We have to bring them together.

DE: So you are convinced synergy between the academic and commercial worlds pays?
Fung: I can give you an example of the digital camera that you are using now was invented at the end of the 70s.

But when was it commercialised? The end of the 90’s - 20 years later. The first digital camera was invented by Kodak but Kodak has now gone bankrupt!

DE: Are you saying a university like UMS with a forestry degree programme is important?

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DE: Do you think this to be the reality, the truth?
Fung: This has always been the truth.

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