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CHAMBER TO TRANSFORM ORANG ULU ECONOMY

THE establishment of Orang Ulu Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OUCCI) has one ultimate goal — to develop and transform the economy of the Orang Ulu.

Its president Datuk Mutang Tagal said apart from serving as a bridge between the government and the community, the chamber would push the Orang Ulu to develop their potential and resources and take part in business and digitalisation.

"The Orang Ulu must be on par with the others who are trading in the stock markets like Bursa Malaysia.

"Therefore, the chamber attempts to provide guidance and upskill the community so that they can participate in commerce and subsequently improve their standard of living," he said during an exclusive interview with New Sarawak Tribune and its sister paper Suara Sarawak on Monday.

New Sarawak Tribune: Datuk, what is OUCCI and what best defines its function?

Mutang: The OUCCI was established and officially registered under the Registrar of Societies (ROS) in September 2019. It is the first organisation which emphasises on assisting the Orang Ulu entrepreneurs.

We must understand that Malaysia is a country with an outlook of vast economic development and this expansion includes Sarawak. Especially in Sarawak, projects and businesses continue to progress expeditiously. These projects and developments are expected to boost the economy and will continue as so.

Therefore, we must train our people to become better skilled, proficient and highly capable people. Once conditioned and prepared as entrepreneurs, their involvement in businesses will evolve.

Why can't an Orang Ulu

company be listed in the Bursa Malaysia stock market? With that level of accomplishment in business, how would it inspire the Orang Ulu community? To achieve such a goal, the Orang Ulu will face a whole different game and reach a new league that will put them on the pathway of mainstream business and compete with major companies.

Ultimately, the chamber aims to create a pool of Orang Ulu entrepreneurs so that we can become community — cultivated and learned in commercial and industrial sectors. This is needed because no longer are we limited only to the involvement in the longhouses in Belaga and Baram area where among the other things, we are also involved in the industries and commerce of cities like Kuala Lumpur, Kuching, Miri, Sibul and Bintulu.

In particular, the chamber will facilitate training and mentoring programmes for the Orang Ulu men and women — depending on their pool of talent. We will become the main liaison for the Orang Ulu, connecting them between their community and other social groups, with the federal and state government, with relevant ministries and agencies and others.

The chamber will work and act as a database or source of information granted by the government and make sure that the data, message and knowledge are cascaded down to the members of the chamber.

We will assist when it comes to any government policies affecting businesses and industries by giving technical advice and support to the Orang Ulu entrepreneurs. The chamber will be actively involved in promoting members to be active in commerce and industries as well as recruiting new members.

How many members currently have and what are the basic membership requirements?

Currently, we have about 100 registered members. At this juncture, we have already started data collection on the



Orang Ulu entrepreneurs in the state.

To become a member of OUCCI, that person must pass the qualification requirements. Firstly you must have a registered business, whether it is under partnership, firm, Sendirian Berhad or Berhad for those involved in contracts and services, having an existing business is the first criteria. Professionals like lawyers with legal firms and as with doctors who own private medical clinics can also apply to become members. The bottom line is you must have a business and it must be registered.

Setting this criterion gave us an opportunity that allowed us to troubleshoot some crucial circumstances such as identifying that many of our Orang Ulu who are involved in business or trading at the longhouses were not registered or did not have trading licences.

The chamber has looked into this and we are helping them to register their businesses properly... this includes businesses that have been passed down the generations.

Elaborate on how information is disseminated to the Orang Ulu community

At the moment, we are still working on

the information flow from the chamber to different entrepreneurs in different areas. We have members from different towns who are our liaisons and representatives.

Besides that, we have been working with the Federation of Orang Ulu Sarawak Malaysia (Forum) which comprises nine Orang Ulu associations, namely Sarawak Kenyah National Association, Sarawak Kayan Association, Sarawak Lun Bawang Association, Rurum Kelabit Sarawak, Sarawak Tipun Penan Development Association, Sarawak Berawan Association, Saban Miri Society Association, Sarawak Lakiput Association and Sarawak Bisaya Association. The different Forum members can help to disseminate the information to the people on the ground, too. We are also looking into working closely with the village chiefs, community leaders and professionals but this is still in the fine-tuning process.

As OUCCI aims to motivate the Orang Ulu, how many successful Orang Ulu do you have onboard to help achieve this purpose?

We have many Orang Ulu who are successful entrepreneurs such as Datuk Jun Ngau Wan who is the chief executive officer (CEO) of Amalgamated Plant Engineering based in Bintulu and he is OUCCI's treasurer-general. Next, we have Datuk

Nelson Balang Rining who is the co-founder and president of Oceanicare Corporation Sdn Bhd and holds the position of vice president in OUCCI. Another successful entrepreneur is Peru Balan Ding who was in the banking industry but ventured into oil and gas (O&G) field and founded Persafe Engineering Sdn Bhd in 1995. Roselyn Lah is one of our women entrepreneurs who is involved in handicrafts and she has been travelling around the world with the Sarawak Tourism Board on various missions abroad.

We also have other figures such as Datuk Isaac Lugun — a Kelabit from Long Lellang who has been running public listed companies and is presently the managing director of Cahya Mata Sarawak Berhad (CMS); Roland Bala — the first Malaysian to be appointed as Heneiken Malaysia's managing director; Thomas Apun — a Lun Bawang from Limbang who is now the CEO of Barama Company Limited based in Guyana, a subsidiary under Samling Group of Companies; Datuk Mohammad Medan Abdullah — the group chief executive officer of Bintulu Port Holdings Berhad (BPHB); and Datuk Seri Idris Jala — a former minister in the Prime Minister's Department and presently holds the position of the president and CEO of the Performance Management and Delivery Unit (Pemandu) Associates, a global consulting



firm focused on public sector transformation and business turnaround.

We will be asking these successful people to help out because they are the role models for the Orang Ulu in business.

What does the future hold in terms of challenges?

As we witness Orang Ulu helping public listed companies, the chamber would like to see these companies listed in the stock market one day, getting involved in the rarified atmosphere, boardroom and all that. Those will be the challenges for the chamber to champion the core self of Orang Ulu entrepreneurs or tech entrepreneurs in the future.

Therefore, we will not only focus on improving just basic things like production of goods and services and food production but we will emphasize preparing our young entrepreneurs in other fields such as information technology (IT) and digital economy because everything is done online today. There is no shortcut to it. If we are not in the IT revolution, we will not be able to compete.

The chamber will also look into upskilling our people. We have a lot of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) based institutions like Centre of Technical Excellence Sarawak (Centexs) as well as local universities like Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas), Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), Swinburne University, Curtin University, University College of Technology Sarawak (UCTS) and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). We want young people to enrol in these universities to undertake skill training.

Education is a fundamental component of the chamber's



duty in ensuring that the young generation is given proper guidance in terms of choosing courses that they want to pursue a Bachelor's Degree, Diploma or skill training. Often, after the students finish Form Five, they take up courses which may not be relevant nor skewed towards meeting the future industry's needs. At the end of the day, when they graduate, they find it hard to land suitable jobs.

What approaches are taken to ensure quality education and industry demand qualities are properly instilled in the youths?

Recently, Binary University of Management and Entrepreneurship founder and executive chairman, Tan Sri Datuk Professor Joseph Adakalam, contacted me bearing good news saying that the university was offering RM3 million scholarships for 400 young Orang Ulu to study at the university for the first three years.

This is a perfect initiative because the university, which is rated five-star by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), is known to specialise in management, IT, entrepreneurship and industry-specialised professionals. In other words, the training that it offers to students is skewed towards making sure that its graduates will be employed by industries.

On our part, the chamber will have to look into locating the school leavers after Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) and identify those who can fill in the slots offered by the Binary University.

At the same time, we will also look at other universities that can work with the chamber in providing skill training to the Orang Ulu community so that they can obtain good education which will help them have a good



start in life.

How do you see the state government's role in assisting the Orang Ulu?

The chamber is very thankful to the Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS) state government under the leadership of Chief Minister Datuk Patinggi Abang Johari Tun Openg for establishing three development agencies, namely, Upper Rajang Development Agency (URDA), Highland Development Agency (HDA) and Northern Region Development Agency (NRDA).

URDA covers upper Rajang which includes Belaga area where you have the Kayan, Kenyah and Penan people (sub-groups of Orang Ulu). Meanwhile, HDA covers Baram area where you have the Kayans, Kenyahs, Kelabit Berawans, Kelabit Kiputs, Penans, Lun Bawang and Sabans. On the other hand, NRDA covers Limbang and Lawas areas where the Bisayas (Limbang) and Lun Bawangs (Lawas) are residing.

The chief minister gave RM1.5 billion each to these agencies to speed up and do a quantum leap in terms of infrastructure development to connect all the rural areas, especially where the majority of the Orang Ulu are residing, to the market.

Without these developments such as electricity and roads, then the rural community do not have cold storage to preserve their food or sell produces in the market because they're no longer fresh. They also need to have good telecommunication systems so that with good Internet connectivity, they can market their products online.

When the basic infrastructures are completed, the Orang Ulu can open up their lands and venture into agriculture. Then, they

can bring their fresh produce straight to the market. And if they can develop skills in manufacturing post-harvest and sell all their goods and produces that they grow, they can add value to their products and export to bigger markets. All these Orang Ulu areas have the empurau fish (Tor tambroides) and semah fish (Tor labeobarbus). Apart from that, you have the flora and fauna, the herbs, spices and animal sanctuary.

So the chamber will have to make sure that we can monetise these assets to provide incomes to the Orang Ulu so that by 2030, they will be in the middle class and some are probably in the upper-middle class. They will have good and stable incomes and be able to send their children to schools to receive a good education as well as enjoy good health facilities and services.

Besides agriculture, what other businesses will be exposed to the Orang Ulu?

The assets that the Orang Ulu have are their native customary right (NCR) lands. Therefore, they should first utilise their lands for agriculture and generate the incomes from them. When they have the income, then they can invest in other areas.

The Orang Ulu cannot pretend to be like the Chinese. If you ask the people in the longhouses to start a business in the towns or the cities, they can't do it because it's foreign to them. They don't have the management expertise. However, if they can get the lands developed first and have the initial incomes, then they will be able to use the incomes as investments to venture into other fields.

For instance, 10 years ago, if you visited Iban longhouses, it was hard to find cars, lorries or four-wheel drive vehicles. Now if you go to the longhouses, each door will own a Hilux and some even have three-tonne trucks. The reason is that they have started to plant oil palms and make money. When the oil palm prices are good, they can buy all these cars and afford other amenities such as air conditioners, satellite television provided

Astro and the Internet. Especially during this time of Covid-19 pandemic, going into food production is the best way. If you have a small piece of land, you should cultivate a 'Food is Always in The House (Faith)' garden. This means you should try to grow everything that you need so that there's always food on the table for your family. If there is excess food, you can sell them in the market and earn a decent income.

What plans, and strategies will OUCCI use to indoctrinate the Orang Ulu with business and digitisation culture?

We will conduct a lot of seminars or programmes to educate people. Our Orang Ulu Yang Berhormats (elected representatives) also have to do a lot of work to inform and explain to the people how the chamber can assist them.

If you're a politician, you would want to say popular things but popular things may not be the right thing. You tell the people what they want to hear, but it is not necessarily good for them. Therefore, for the OUCCI, we don't mince our words. We will tell the people what is necessary if they want to advance.

What do wish to see in the next five to 10 years?

Sarawak is currently on track to achieving a high income and developed state status by 2030. To reach that goal, I believe we are talking about probably USD15,000 per capita monthly income for Sarawak to qualify as a high-income state. If we reach this goal, then Sarawak will be joining the ranks of the first-world countries like the United States of America, Europe, Japan and Canada.

When we reach this goal, my wishlist is for the Orang Ulu not to be left behind. Let there be no more poverty among the Orang Ulu. Even though we are in the longhouses or villages, our incomes are there. That is why we need to develop the income-generating sources for the Orang Ulu.

