

# Gaining strength from the Dayak's legacy of Tumbang Anoi

## Exploring Sustainable Development

with Dr Goh Chun Sheng

DURING the harvesting season 129 years ago, more than 1,000 Dayak leaders from all over Borneo gathered at a place in Kalimantan known as Tumbang Anoi to participate in one of the most significant meetings in the history of Dayak civilization.

While cleaning my office last week, I stumbled upon a book I purchased five years ago in West Kalimantan called 'Simfoni di Tanah Dayak' by Munalidus Nerang, the founder of Credit Union (CU) Kumang Keling, and his co-authors Yuspita Karlena and Yohanes RJ.

The book starts with the author's reflection on standing by the Kahayan River in Tumbang Anoi, which brought back my memories of a field trip almost nine years ago in Central Kalimantan.

My journey began in Palangka Raya, where I met Pak Agus, a local guide and a friend, and we rode up to Gunung Mas district, stopping at various places, including the two main towns of Kuala Kurun and Tewah.

However, we did not venture further into the interior, where many Dayak villages are located, with names starting with 'Tumbang', meaning 'river mouth' in the Dayak Ngaju-Ot Danum language, much like the word 'Nanga' and 'Long' in other parts of Borneo. Our last stop was Tumbang Miri.

During the trip, Pak Agus told me the story of Tumbang Anoi,



The Tumbang Anoi Peace Accord signed in 1894 ended the conflicts between Dayak sub-tribes, such as headhunting, wars, and slavery throughout Borneo.

a historically significant place for the Dayak people. Located in the northern part of the district, close to the border with West Kalimantan, it was the site of a crucial meeting in 1894, which led to the Tumbang Anoi Peace Accord.

The meeting, known as the Tumbang Anoi Peace Meeting, marked a turning point in the history of the Dayak civilisation in Kalimantan. It took place 129 years ago, from May to July 1894, intending to end the conflicts between Dayak sub-tribes, such as headhunting, wars, and slavery throughout Borneo.

### The Dayaks and the Dutch colonist

As Pak Agus explained, the period before 1894 was known as the Kayau-Asang era, characterised by headhunting. The Dayaks considered the Dutch colonists their enemies, and this hatred led to war, as

seen in the battles that erupted with the Dutch in the 1850s, which inflicted heavy losses on Dutch soldiers and warships.

Dr Anton Willem Nieuwenhuis, a Leiden-trained medical doctor, wrote about his trips from Pontianak to Samarinda in the 1890s. On the first trip in 1893, the team had to stop at Putussibau as they encountered hostility from the tribes in Upper Mahakam. (Note: He eventually made it to Samarinda from Pontianak in 1897.)

The Dutch government was particularly interested in ending the inter-tribal conflicts in the interest of their colonial activities to maintain control over the region. This policy was pursued through both physical aggression and policies aimed at 'modifying' the local culture, with political objectives to extend Dutch rule to the Upper Mahakam and Upper Kayan regions and establish peace

and security. In 1894, the Dutch government invited all the Dayak tribes in Borneo to hold a peace meeting.

### The Peace Accord

Organising such a meeting was a monumental task at the time. Inter-regional access relied primarily on rivers, making it a daunting challenge to gather all tribes in Borneo. Tumbang Anoi was ultimately chosen due to its central location, making it accessible for guests from all regions. Invitations were conveyed verbally through each region's leaders, and the delegates who attended the peace meeting had to be tribal leaders or chiefs knowledgeable about the customs of their respective regions.

According to the Borneo Institute in Palangkaraya, Damang Batu – the Dayak chief in Central Kalimantan – played a central role in the peace

negotiations. He was considered one of the most instrumental figures in the Peace Meeting, as he hosted the three-month-long event at his Rumah Betang (longhouse) and bore the cost. Given Damang Batu's extensive knowledge of the customs and traditions in Kalimantan at the time, the Dayak chiefs agreed to meet at his residence.

The meeting was held over the harvest season and, according to various sources I read online, involved the consumption of 60 buffaloes, more than 100 cows, and hundreds of pigs and chickens.

As a result, the Peace Accord put an end to the '4H' conflict between Dayak tribes in Borneo, namely 'Hakayau' (headhunting), 'Hajipen' (enslavement), 'Hasang' (invasion), and 'Habunu' (killing). Damang Batu became an iconic figure in the history of the Dayak civilisation for his vital role in ending the tradition of hostility between Dayak sub-tribes.

### Inspiring visions for future generations

Although the meeting is widely regarded as the 'dawn of civilisation' for the Dayak people, there are varying interpretations of the event. Kusni Sulang of the Borneo Institute, in his article for the Kalimantan Review, argued that the meeting was part of the 'divide and rule' strategy employed by the Dutch colonists in Borneo to strengthen their colonial grip on the island. This view is shared by other scholars such as Ahim S. Rusan, pointing out the importance of considering a critical perspective on this aspect of Dayak history.

However, it seems that Tumbang Anoi has somehow evolved into a symbol of unity for the Dayak people. In July 2019, the international seminar

and expedition 'Napak Tilas Tumbang Anoi' attracted more than 5,000 Dayaks from various parts of Borneo, including Sarawak, Sabah, and Brunei Darussalam. The event included traditional performances, a Rumah Betang tour, and discussions about the unity and development of the Dayak community throughout Borneo.

While the event in 2019 commemorated the Peace Accord in 1894, it also aimed to find ways to integrate the Dayak community into mainstream development, particularly a more sustainable one.

The importance of education, public amenities, and infrastructure development to connect rural Dayak communities was also emphasised. The significance of the Peace Accord seems to have gone beyond its historical context.

Munalidus Nerang, in his book, mentions how Tumbang Anoi and Damang Batu inspired him to pursue his dream of building a better future and improving the livelihood of his people through his vision of a Credit Union.

He wrote, 'Bagaimana legacy ini dapat menjadi kekuatan dalam membangun Credit Union di Tanah Dayak?' (How can this legacy become a strength in building Credit Unions in Dayak Land?) This is another interesting story that I will share in the next article. Selamat Hari Gawai Dayak!

Dr Goh Chun Sheng is a researcher at Harvard University. He is interested in exploring sustainable development in both Malaysian and Indonesian Borneo. His book, *Transforming Borneo: From Land Exploitation to Sustainable Development* was recently published by ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore.

# Childhood cancer: A parent's worst nightmare

Cindy Lai

THE last thing a mother would expect is being told that her child is sick with cancer. Whether it is a common or chronic type of cancer, such news can be traumatising, let alone having to face the disease.

Mother of four Sumanti Siman was in disbelief when informed of her son Didymus Sim's cancer diagnosis – T-Cell Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia (T-ALL) – in 2016.

For some time, she was in denial and kept telling herself that the doctor must have made a mistake, even though her son had been unwell with continuous fever, weakness and muscle pain.

"I thought there must be some mistake in the blood test result. The doctor explained that my son, who was six years old at the time, had the type of cancer that occurs in children.

"He said they tend to do better at a young age (with early detection and proper treatment) compared to older children," said Sumanti.

T-ALL is an aggressive form of blood cancer. It falls into a broader category of leukaemia called acute lymphoblastic leukaemia (ALL), which is also known as the most common form of cancer in children. The age of children diagnosed with



Throwback photo of two participants showing off their shaved heads.

"I was with her till the end of the fight. So I basically understand the importance of immediate treatment to fight it," she added.

When doctors explained to the couple the types and stages of treatment for their son, Sumanti said they agreed without giving it a second thought.

They did not consider seeking alternative treatment as they knew Didy was extremely ill at that time, and there was no time to waste.

During the time of her son's diagnosis, Sumanti was working as an executive for a local company in Miri.

She and her husband

"Didy was put under chemotherapy treatment almost immediately upon admission to SGH. There were frequent blood takings and oral medications.

"Chemotherapy was the major part of his treatment. The drugs may come in pill form or injected directly into the vein.

"I would constantly be on alert at all times because different drugs have different side effects. Apart from going bald, he would also get infections, tiredness, mouth sores, loss of appetite, nausea/vomiting and diarrhoea."

The treatment and monitoring process took over nine months and both mother and son finally returned to Miri in May 2017 after



Participants of the GoBald 2013 main event in Miri pose for a group photo after the shave.



symptoms turned out to be blood cancer?

About 98 per cent of children with ALL go into remission after treatment and many go on to be fully cured.

Based on Sarawak Children's Cancer Society (SCCS) records, it handled a total of 26 paediatric cancer cases between January and May 17 this year.

ALL is between two years and 10 years.

Upon receiving the devastating news, Sumanti said she cried almost every day and only controlled her emotions at the advice of her husband, who worried that it would affect their son.

"Didy was only six years old. He didn't know or understand about his health condition. He thought his sickness was just a normal flu."

For Sumanti, her son's diagnosis brought back painful memories of losing her best friend to cancer a few years earlier.

immediately flew to Kuching with Didy for treatment at Sarawak General Hospital (SGH), leaving their three other children – the youngest aged only eight months – in the care of her mother and mother-in-law.

Even though she loved her job, she made the decision to resign so that she could remain in Kuching with her son until the completion of his treatment.

She witnessed her son having a central venous catheter/line (CVL) inserted into his upper right chest – a crucial step for drug administration and for drawing blood.

completing the chemotherapy cycle.

Didymus' response so far towards his treatment means he has a high chance of recovery.

Looking back the chronology of events from the cancer diagnosis to the challenges of taking care of her son during treatment, and with Didymus on the road to recovery, Sumanti feels she had been given a second chance at life.

"Time indeed flies so fast. I still remember vividly the time spent with my son during his treatment at SGH Kuching. That experience really changed me, my outlook on life and perspective towards



Photo file of the GoBald 2019 campaign held at Vivacity Megamall Kuching.

others."

In fact, she has no regrets leaving her job for her children, and is determined to create more memories with them and to fill their lives – and that of the people around her – with more love, laughter and joy.

If there is one advice Sumanti

wishes to share with others, it would be to always look out for their children's health, be it physical or mentally.

A sick child may be just the tip of the iceberg. In our case, that is how it all started. Who would have thought that a bit of flu, prolonged fever and other

Three of the highest cases reported in Sarawak are ALL at seven cases; brain cancer (six cases) and neuroblastoma (three cases).

SCCS' GoBald campaign – now in its 15th year – raises funds to provide assistance and support services to families of paediatric cancer, while at the same time educating the public on the crucial need to assist children with cancer in getting proper treatment.

The Go Bald 2023 campaign takes place June 11, 2023 from 1.30pm to 7.20pm at Permaisuri Imperial City Mall in Miri.

