

## TAR UMT Lecturer Becomes First Orang Asli Female to Receive Merdeka Award Grant



KUALA LUMPUR: A lecturer from Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology (TAR UMT) in Pahang has become the first orang Asli female to be conferred the Merdeka Award Grant for International Attachment. A member of the Jakun tribe, Masni Mat Dong was one of the five exceptional young Malaysians to receive the award from the Sultan of Perak and Royal Patron of the Merdeka Award Trust, Sultan Nazrin Shah at a ceremony here on Friday (Aug 25).

The 33-year-old was granted the award for her outstanding research proposal on "Reimagining Inclusive Development: A Spatial Justice and Multi-dimensional Poverty Perspective on the Orang Asli in Malaysia", which aims to uplift the quality of life of the community.

"Due to our remote locations, the orang Asli community faces numerous obstacles and challenges, such as the displacement of numerous communities and the loss of their cultural heritage. "With the grant given, I am looking to undergo my attachment at the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, University of Oxford in England, with the aim of studying the spatial injustice and multidimensional poverty of the Orang Asli," she told reporters here.

To date, the total number of grant recipients has reached 29, who have secured their attachments at 30 institutions of higher learning across nine countries. Apart from Masni, other recipients for this year include full-time PhD student Syaza Soraya Sauli; Sabah's Danau Girang Field Centre research officer Amaziasizamoria Jumail; Xiamen University Malaysia assistant professor Dr Ng Chuck Chuan and postdoctoral fellow at Nanyang Technological University Dr Kong Xin Ying. Amaziasizamoria, 33, who is currently working on the Regrow Borneo project in the Kinabatangan floodplain, has planned to undergo her attachment at the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Morelos (UAEM) in Mexico, where she will be studying "Tropical Forest Restoration Ecology within a Global South Context."

"In Sabah, the Kinabatangan floodplain is an important habitat for biodiversity and offers suitable opportunities for carbon sequestration. "Unfortunately, 80% of the forest has been converted for non-forest uses. This is why we established the Regrow Borneo project in Kinabatangan floodplain in 2019 to sequester carbon by replanting trees. "Such reforestation efforts are essential towards improving the livelihood of local communities as well as enhancing biodiversity and ecosystem resilience.

"However, while many forest restoration efforts have been implemented in Malaysia, there has been no large-scale assessment of the impacts of forest restoration to date," she added. With her attachment at UAEM, she aims to study suitable indicators for reforestation efforts such as forest structure, ecological functions and biodiversity as feasible methods to evaluate the outcome of effective forest restoration. "As Malaysia and Mexico are biodiversity hotspots facing comparable challenges in terms of deforestation, climate change, and socio-economic impacts, this attachment will enable me to work with a world-renowned research team and learn from an existing model that could be used as a guideline for the Bornean rainforest," she added. - Bernama

