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No Tony Stark but Besi Dulah is Melaka's 'Ironman'



[File pic] He doesn't have a suit like Tony Stark but Besi Dulah, headman of the two Temuan sub-ethnic community villages in Melaka is 'Ironman' in his own way. - Marvel pic via AP

By Bernama - October 24, 2018 @ 1:27pm

MELAKA: When the Orang Asli living in two remote villages in this state face a problem, who do they call? 'Ironman Melaka', of course.

This 'Ironman' is no superhero. It is merely the nickname of Besi Dulah, the headman of the Temuan sub-ethnic community living in Kampung Orang Asli Kubang Badak and the nearby Kampung Orang Asli Tebong Stesen, both located in Tebong - about 30 kilometres from Alor Gajah and 40 km from Bandar Hilir.

Prior to meeting Besi, this writer had conjured up an image of a strapping muscleman based on the various stories she had heard about him from others.

She was quite spot on as Besi, 37, does have a sturdy physique - hence, the nickname 'Ironman' given to him by the locals. Even some of the State Executive Council members are known to call him 'Ironman'.

During a recent visit to Kampung Orang Asli Kubang Badak, this writer and the photographer were greeted on arrival by Besi and several other villagers, all wearing the characteristic headband woven from coconut fronds around their heads.

The Temuan sport the curly hair and thick lips typical of the Orang Asli but they are taller and their complexion a little fairer than the indigenous people from other sub-ethnic groups. In fact, it is said that the Temuan people are the 'most good-looking' among all the Orang Asli communities.

Based on the Department of Orang Asli Development's (Jakoa) records, there are about 30,000 Temuan people living in Peninsular Malaysia. The Temuan community in the state of Melaka numbered about 1,430 as of March this year, according to the Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit's (MAMPU) open data portal

YOUNG HEADMAN

The amiable Besi was selected by his people as their 'Tok Batin' (headman) in June last year in view of his leadership qualities and abilities, as well as his wide knowledge in various matters, particularly those related to the community and their customs.

Besi said he never expected to be appointed as headman but decided to take up the challenge as he regarded it as an opportunity for young people like him to serve the community.

"Since the age of 21, I have actively involved myself in the various activities conducted in our village. And, whenever there are Orang Asli gatherings, particularly outside Melaka, the villagers would send me as their representative to discuss issues related to our community.

"Usually, at that age, people want to be free but I was happy to meet and mingle with people who were much older than me as engaging with them trained me to think in a more mature manner which is handy when making decisions," he said.

Although Besi only studied up to standard three (he quit school due to his family's financial constraints), he speaks articulately and he certainly has the characteristics of a leader with a vision.

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EDUCATION



As headman, Besi knows only too well that his main challenge is to improve the academic achievements of the children in Kampung Orang Asli Kubang Badak and Kampung Orang Asli Tebong Stesen.



"Many Orang Asli parents still have a low level of awareness on the importance of education as they have little exposure (to the outside world).

"I'm aware that many opportunities are being given to Orang Asli students but, unfortunately, they don't realise the importance of education," he said, adding that he is worried about the future of his community's younger generation who seem to be left out of the mainstream of development.

"We can't force the children to study, All we can do is encourage them and keep reminding them that only education can ensure a better future for them."

Kampung Kubang Badak has a population of about 150 and Kampung Tebong Stesen, 50. Like Besi, most of the villagers eke out a living by doing odd jobs and foraging the forest for food and other produce that have commercial value. Some of them work in factories.

Their children go to school at Sekolah Kebangsaan Tebong and Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Tebong, located just five kilometres from the two villages.

IN NEED OF INTERNET CENTRE, NEW BRIDGE

Their villages may be located in a remote area but, said Besi, the Orang Asli villagers are well aware of mobile communications and do not want to miss out on the advancements in technology.



As such, many of them have smartphones and are savvy users too as they have their own social media accounts and know how to communicate through WhatsApp.



"Some of us use our mobile phones to do Internet banking, check emails and search for information, as well as to keep ourselves updated on the current developments in the country.

"Since we live rather far from the town area, our mobile phones enable us to call the hospital or Jakoa in case of an emergency," he said.

Besi hoped the government would open an Internet centre at their village as not all of them have smartphones or computers.

"An Internet centre will be very useful for our children who need help with their studies as they can search for learning materials on the Internet.

The older children can browse the net for information on higher educational opportunities, among other things," said the father-of-one.

Besi also said that the villagers were in need of a new bridge to cross the 30-metre wide river in the area where they live as the previous one was destroyed as a result of sand-mining activities that occurred 15 years ago.

Currently, they are forced to wade across the one-metre deep river with their loads of fruits, oil palm fruits and rubber to get to the other side, where their produce is either sold to wholesalers or taken to Alor Gajah to be sold there.

"About 50 of us cross the river daily and it can be dangerous when it rains and the water level rises. Sometimes, we have to cancel our plan to sell our produce (due to the high water level)," he added. -- BERNAMA

