KUCHING: Sarawak has much to offer researchers in terms of its rich natural environment and diverse cultures.

And for that, Minister of Social Development Tan Sri William Mawan Ikom was proud to note that since its establishment in 1888 the Sarawak Museum had been the centre for research in the state until today.

"Whether botany, zoology, anthropology, archaeology or any other related sciences, the museum has been the repository of knowledge and the point of contact for international, regional and local researchers for over a century.

"Over the years many researchers from the natural sciences and humanities have worked here, first among them was Alfred Russell Wallace, who formulated his theory of the evolution of species around the same time as Charles Darwin," he said.

Mawan, who is also Senior Minister, said this in his text of speech read by Assistant Culture and Heritage Minister Liwan Lagang at the launch of a photography exhibition at the Sarawak Museum here yesterday.

"Today, Sarawak Museum is not the only research institution since a number of other national and international institutions such as Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas), Swinburne University of Technology and others have been established in this region.

"On the micro level, we have agencies such as the Majlis Adat Istiadat, Sarawak Cultural Foundation, Tun Jugah Foundation and not forgetting Pustaka Negeri that also become alternative resource or reference centres," he added.

However, he said, the Sarawak Museum as the oldest and most established centre of learning had a distinctive role to play and its archives contained many treasures important for the understanding of Sarawak's history that remained to be discovered.

He said the photography exhibition organised by Sarawak Museum Department from yesterday until May 27 was just one of the various means to create public awareness on the cultural treasures of the communities along the Baram and Tinjar.

He added that the exhibition would also show the rich cultural aspects of the people living in the area to visitors from within Malaysia and abroad, which should be preserved for the next generations.

Earlier, Sarawak Museum Department director Ipoi Datan said the exhibition entitled 'The Ulu and the Museum' would showcase photographs taken in the Baram and Tinjar rivers between 1960 and 1980 kept in the museum's archives.
Most rituals and ceremonies have long been abandoned

The images mainly depict the Kenyah, Kayan, Sebop and Berawan communities as they went about doing their everyday activities as well as events related to rituals and ceremonies, most of which had long been abandoned.

Among the longhouses covered were Long San, Long Loyang, Long Sobeng, Long Makabar, Long Selatong, Long Buroi and others.

Also present at the launch of the exhibition were Social Development Ministry permanent secretary Affendi Keli, Kuching Resident Abdul Rahman Sebli and exhibition director Christine Horn from Swinburne University.

IN LOVING MEMORY: Sebastian Kajang Gau, 72, a Kenyah from Long Ikang in Baram (right) draws Liwan’s (right) attention to the picture of his late father Penghlulu Gau, his late mother A’an Kuleh and his aunt in a photo which was taken in Sept 1956.