



23 September, 2005

CM: Sabah needs to position to gain from East Asian's expanding economy

Kota Kinabalu: Sabah needs to focus and position herself as an important regional player in order to gain from the East Asian region's expanding economy, Chief Minister Datuk Musa Aman said.

The region continues to be one of the world's fastest growing and the emergence of technological advancement and borderless trade has created tremendous investment opportunities and new market frontiers for Sabah.

"We must not be passive, but instead be proactive in carving a strategic approach to exploit and gain a stronger foothold closer to home before embarking aggressively onto the more lucrative markets on the global scale," he said.

His speech at the opening of the East Malaysia Maritime Conference (EMMC) 2005 themed "Exploring New Opportunities And Challenges In Port And Shipping Developments In East Malaysia" at Magellan, was read by Resource Development and Information Technology Minister, Datuk Dr Yee Moh Chai.

The two-day conference was organised jointly by Institute for Development Studies (IDS) Sabah, Kasi Maritime Consultants Sdn Bhd (KASI) and JBC Solution Sdn Bhd, with sponsorship by Suria Group and Sabah Development Bank Berhad and Sedco as co-sponsors.

Chairman of MIG Maritime, Malaysian Industry-Government Group For High Technology (MIGHT) and Matrade, Tan Sri Halim Mohammad, who is the organising chairman, and IDS Sabah Director, Dr Mohd Yaakub Johari, among others, were also present.

Appreciating the role played by the various maritime authorities such Sabah Ports, Marine Department, Fisheries Department and the other state and federal agencies for their direct and indirect contribution to the maritime development in Sabah, Musa said they have brought positive progress within the State's maritime sector over the years.

"Of course, we cannot overlook the role played by the private sector, for without them it would be difficult to achieve the level of trading or commercial activities that we have experienced to this day," he said.

According to Musa, the realisation of Afta that had made intra-regional trade more competitive means that there is an even greater need for regional co-operation amongst the BIMP-EAGA member countries.

Member countries must pool their resources and put in place the necessary support system including modern seaports, shipping, banking and other intra-regional communication and transportation facilities.

"While some may categorised the BIMP-EAGA as the backwaters of the Asean economy, it should be noted that this sub-regional economic co-operation zone covers more than 1.5 million square kilometre and has a population of more than 50 million people.

"In view of its potential, the Sabah Government continues support the objectives of BIMP-EAGA and hence, places great importance on its progress. In same vein, we will continue to develop the role of Sabah as the potential regional hub for this region," he said.

Our strategic location places us in a better position to be a gateway into this important regional economic entity, he added.

In line with the objectives of the Halatuju (direction of development), the Government will continue to spearhead the development of necessary infrastructures in its bid to provide a conducive climate for the development of its maritime industry in the State.

"We will continue to improve on our existing capabilities and strengths with the objective of delivering service in the fastest and most efficient manner. Obviously, there will be obstacles and part of our task is to identify, analyse and formulate concrete plans to overcome such constraints," he said.

In regard to this, I believe that we should open our minds and adopt approaches that have proven to be successful for others. "We can learn from the successes of several foreign countries on how they have strategically positioned themselves to become centres for cruise liners, shipbuilding, manufacturing and repair and as transshipment points to the rest of the world.

"The economic benefits to be realised from the industry are far reaching," he added.

Musa said given that the maritime industry comprises a cluster of sectors, such as ship owning and operations, shipbuilding and repair, port bunkering, ship agencies, insurance, finance, law, information technology and logistics, and so forth, it has the potential to contribute significantly not only to the State's services sector, but also to the manufacturing and tourism sectors.

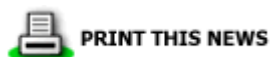
"In this respect, it is important that we take bold steps in mobilising our resources and look at ways to create and ensure that a sustainable pool of competent workers are readily available at all levels," he continued.

The EMMC 2005, according to Musa, will provide an avenue for further deliberations on the Sabah Maritime Strategic Development Framework, introduced by the State Government a few years back, which underlines the strategic sectors for maritime development in the State that span from shipping, deep-sea fishing to offshore oil and gas and the privatisation of the commercial operation of the Sabah Ports Authority.

"The State Government welcomes the opinions or suggestions on how we can better achieve our objectives for maritime development," said Musa, while hoping the knowledge and expertise given through the wide-ranging topics to be discussed in the event will benefit its participants.

Besides showcasing the immense opportunities of the industry, he said the EMMC 2005 should serve to raise the profile of the maritime industry as well as educate and encourage our young generation, students and professionals to consider maritime careers.

"We must continue to network on matters related seaports development and conservation of marine resources. In all, we must work together with our neighbours through co-operative approaches, smart partnerships and collaborative efforts to make this region economically attractive and a safer place to live in," he said.



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