

MoU inked to set up Sabah's first maritime academy

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From left: Carl Moosom, Chairman of BIMP-EAGA Business Council (Sabah), James, Pandikar, Fredian, Yong, Dr Haleem and Datuk Dr Mohd Yaakub Hj Johari, Chairman of UCSF, Board of Directors.

KOTA KINABALU (April 23): Sabah's first maritime academy, has been mooted to drive knowledge and development in the sector and position the State's east coast as a regional maritime hub.

Three entities – POIC Sabah Sdn Bhd, University College Sabah Foundation (UCSF) and BIMP-EAGA Maritime Academy Sabah Sdn Bhd (BEMA), inked a Memorandum of Understanding for Strategic Cooperation on Saturday to set in motion a project of significant ramifications to Sabah's plan for eastern Sabah, centered in POIC Lahad Datu which is being developed by POIC Sabah Sdn Bhd.

POIC Lahad Datu, developed since 2005, is an industrial park served by a deep-water harbour located along the Lombok-Makassar shipping route. POIC Sabah plans to leverage on its strategic location to develop Lahad Datu and eastern Sabah into a logistics hub for the BIMP-EAGA region. Meanwhile the State envisages an international airport and a maritime transportation hub in Lahad Datu to create regional connectivity (sea, land and air) leading to greater economic growth and linkages.

The MoU was duly signed by Chief Executive Officer Datuk Fredian Gan for POIC Sabah Sdn Bhd, Vice Chancellor Dr Mohamed Haleem Bin Mohamed Razi for UCSF and Director Datuk James Bin Ibrahim for BIMP-EAGA Maritime Academy Sabah Sdn Bhd.

POIC Sabah Chairman Datuk Seri Panglima Yong Teck Lee and Tan Sri Pandikar Amin Hj Mulia, Special Envoy and Advisor BIMP-EAGA to YAB CM Sabah signed as witnesses.

Yong whom the MOU designated as the Chairman of a Working Committee towards realization of the Maritime Academy, said preliminary contacts have been established with an institution in China for academic and technical input for the proposed academy, which ties in with POIC Sabah's vision for a regional logistics hub.

"Sabah has many maritime assets such as ports and harbours but the state as a whole has negligible participation in what is a massive economic sector with much growth potential."

He said that the proposed academy will posture and run as an international institution guided by global industry benchmarks. The BIMP EAGA Business Council will ensure that this academy project be made an agenda item in the business of the EAGA main body.

Dr Mohamed Haleem described the MOU as 'historic' as it brought together parties of different knowledge, expertise technology and experience. He foresaw a maritime academy that is open and internationally connected.

Speaking on behalf of BEMA, James said the proposed academy will set out to identify the needs of different industries to formulate demand-driven knowledge, products and services.

"The partnership with industries will ensure that skills developed (at the academy) are translated into employment."

While details are being worked out on the plan, it is understood that the academy will be set up in POIC Lahad Datu, with UCSF expected to administer the academy while BEMA, a unit of the BIMP-EAGA Business Council, connects all relevant government and private sector institutions of the BIMP nations.

Some preliminary ideas about the academy are, that it will promote exchange of students with similar academies in EAGA, produce licensed trainers to enrich human resource in marine-related skills across EAGA.

"The EAGA territories are connected. The waters of the South China Sea, Sulu Sea and Celebes Sea wash our shores," said Yong.

"A marine academy will help develop marine human capital and strengthen our region's position in the global logistics map."