



## SEAMEO News Clipping

**Headline:** SEAMEO centres must seek financial autonomy

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CENTRES of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) must exercise prudence given the global economic outlook and build on their existing reputation to achieve financial independence and sustainability, the outgoing president of the regional education council said at a recent forum in Vietnam.

Speaking at the opening of the 47th Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Council (SEAMEC) Conference, Yang Berhormat Pehin Orang Kaya Seri Kerna Dato Seri Setia (Dr) Hj Abu Bakar Hj Apong (pic), Brunei's Education Minister said the existing 20 SEAMEO centres faced the challenges of financial sustainability and the need to stay relevant in "an ever changing (education) landscape".

"Our focus should also be placed on how centres can generate income and be financially independent," he said at the Hanoi meeting held from March 19 to 21.

"Joint efforts and collaborations with strategic partners to gain fund resources are needed to generate quality training and research that is both competitive and sustainable," he added.

YB Pehin Dato Hj Abu Bakar said that there was also a need to audit the centres' functions and programmes, "reviewing their enabling instruments and binding agreements to make them more lean to look at how we can truly leverage on our centres' niche and further enhance their efficiency".

Having toured the SEAMEO facilities in member states over the past two years as the council's rotating president, the education minister urged the centres many of which have achieved "reputable standing" to strive towards world class training, research and consultation, in line with the Golden SEAMEO Vision 2020.

"We must capitalise on this and further develop our network beyond the Southeast Asian region so as to ensure our sustainability. We must continue to aspire for all our centres to achieve international benchmark and recognition," he said in his remarks.

YB Pehin Dato Hj Abu Bakar noted that members that have yet to set up their own centres should look into the feasibility of doing so, with the support of other members with established centres, while pointing out that Cambodia, Laos and Timor Leste all had "unique potentials" that need to be studied.

"I cannot be presumptuous that efforts in one member country can be transferred to another. However, I trust we can all agree that commitment should be set towards realising this aspiration," he said. "I call upon your dedication and concerted effort for a SEAMEO status characterised by the features that we had aimed for: programme responsiveness, financial stability, social mobility, thriving application of modern technologies, and an increase in the organisation's membership."

The education minister, along with other senior officials from SEAMEO and its affiliates, also launched the new SEAMEO College, which will provide education leaders a platform for dialogue and "specialised sharing" in educational tools, according to a statement from Brunei's Ministry of Education. The concept for the college came out from among the resolutions of the 46th SEAMEC Conference hosted by the Sultanate in 2011, the ministry added.

"I believe, this mechanism (the college) will be able to provide a platform for regular, methodical dialogues that will enthuse and generate innovative ideas and initiatives to manage challenges and prospects on education, allow us to benefit from on-going trends, and learn from the experience and best practices of one another, thus promoting the region's social development," YB Pehin Dato Hj Abu Bakar said.

The day before the conference, the education minister paid a courtesy call on Vietnamese President Truong Tan Sang, who was also present for the opening of the SEAMEC conference. YB Pehin Dato Hj Abu Bakar also held a bilateral meeting with his Singapore counterpart, Heng Swee Keat.

Among those in the Bruneian delegation at the conference were Brunei's ambassador to Vietnam, Dato Paduka Hj Mahadi Wasli; Permanent Secretary (Core Education), Dr Hj Junaidi Hj Abd Rahman; and other senior officers from the Ministry of Education, including a secondary school principal.