The Minister of Education visits Thailand

The Minister of Education, Pehin Orang Kaya Seri Kerna Dato Seri Setia (Dr) Hj Awg Abu Bakar bin Hj Apong is currently in Thailand as part of a working visit to Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) regional centres in the country.

Thailand hosts three of the 20 SEAMEO regional centres and the SEAMEO Secretariat, and the first of these centres to receive the minister was the SEAMEO Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO RIHED).

On hand to welcome the minister were the Deputy Secretary-General at the Office of the Higher Education Commission at Thailand’s Ministry of Education, Associate Professor Kamjorn Tatiyakavee MD; and the Director of the SEAMEO RIHED, Associate Professor Dr Sauwakon Ratanawijitrasin, who held a briefing on the centre’s five-year plan and activities for 2013.

The director highlighted that SEAMEO RIHED specialises in regional cooperation of higher education development and serves as the regional centre for promoting the exchange of information and research findings on higher education policy and management.

The minister then visited the SEAMEO TROPMED Network which is the Regional Centre for Tropical Medicine and Public Health based at Mahidol University.
The minister toured the Asia Centre of Excellence for Tropical Diseases and listened to a multimedia presentation on the activities and programmes of SEAMEO TROPMED, where Associate Professor Dr Pratap Singhasivanon held a briefing on the centre’s current activities and school health issues pertaining to malaria and dengue. The SEAMEO TROPMED Network comprises of three sub-regional centres located in Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines.

The minister then visited the SEAMEO Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts (SEAMEO SPAFA) and was welcomed by the Director of the centre, Dr M R Rujaya Abhakorn, who led the delegation on a tour of the centre’s library.

A briefing was held on the centre’s accomplishment. The centre promotes awareness on the development of professional competencies and the conservation of cultural heritage in Southeast Asia with emphasis on archaeology, fine arts, performing arts and cultural studies.

The minister commended the centre’s efforts in making SEAMEO into an organisation that is recognised globally with regard to the provision of high-quality training services and programmes on education, science and culture.

He added that he envisions SEAMEO Regional Centres’ expertise and resources can be further optimised to contribute to the regional growth of Southeast Asia.

The minister mentioned ‘SEAMEO First’, where he encourages all the education ministries in the region to utilise their respective centres as their first choice for human resource development.

He added that these regional centres should create and implement innovative and sustainable programmes that address emergent and cross-cutting regional issues so that SEAMEO can keep pace with the changing demands on human resources. He then discussed the need to always explore possibilities and opportunities for being financially self-sustaining by engaging people, organisations and the local government in partnership
for education, while at the same time helping communities across a broad range of social issues as part of Corporate Social Responsibility.

He concluded that for the purpose of continuously enhancing and optimising their abilities in order to meet regional and international trends and standards, SEAMEO Centres should always learn from each other.

By doing this, the centres then do not engage in a competitive relationship but work together to set up a regional benchmark.

The minister highlighted that this is in line with the aim of attaining a ‘Golden SEAMEO’, which envisages that by 2020, SEAMEO will be a dynamic education community, thriving amidst a variety of economic, social, technological and legal challenges.

He encouraged all these centres to form sustainable relationships with different partners from all sectors to enable SEAMEO to expand its coverage and contribute more toward national and regional growth.

The minister then visited the SEAMEO Secretariat, where he was briefed on the activities pursued by the secretariat. The visit concluded with the presentation of the SEAMEO Suit in recognition of the minister’s role as the President of the SEAMEO Council.

The minister is scheduled to continue his visit to two more SEAMEO member countries – Cambodia and the People’s Democratic Republic of Lao – where the minister will also make a courtesy call on the Minister of Education and several education institutions in respective countries.