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Businesses less aware of Asean, dialogue told

BY TANIA LAM

KUCHING: Several important issues were raised during yesterday's Asean Business Advisory Council (Asean-BAC) Malaysia's dialogue session with Sarawak's small-medium enterprises (SMEs).

Chairman of Asean-BAC Malaysia Tan Sri Dr Munir Majid, who led the discussion, said that businesses away from the major commercial centres in Malaysia were less aware of Asean.

"Its economic size and potential have to be brought to their business consciousness," he stressed.

"But even as we do so, time

and again, what arises are the more immediate problems of local survival and growth. 'Asean yes, but first can you look into these matters for us, such as the challenge of access to finance, new technologies and digital companies, and of size to make a difference?' they would say," said Munir.

The dialogue participants included representatives from SME Corporation (SME Corp) Sarawak, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (Matrade), and the State Economic Planning Unit.

The issue of many existing institutions not engaging and providing sufficient information to business enterprises was raised as well as that of existing regional arrangements such as BIMP-EAGA (Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East Asian Growth Area) not really being actively driven ahead.

SME Corp Sarawak director Ismail Hashim delivered a presentation on SME Corp and the 177 programmes it had pursued last year with an expenditure of RM13.8 billion.

It was clear that there were many financing opportunities not sufficiently known or taken up by SMEs.



MUNIR speaking during the dialogue session.

Another matter raised was entrepreneur development which seemed to be lacking in Sarawak.

While Munir said that many issues raised were not strictly within the remit (area of activity) of Asean-BAC, those

that were could be addressed, such as entrepreneurship development via the Asean Mentorship for Entrepreneurs Network programme, which Asean-BAC Malaysia council member Raja Singham is actively involved in.

As a member of the Prime Minister's Economic Action Council (EAC), Munir said he would bring up some of the other issues at the national level.

During Asean-BAC Malaysia's visit to Kuching, Munir also paid a courtesy call to Chief Minister Datuk Patinggi Abang Johari Tun Openg on Wednesday (February 19) where he discussed some national economic issues as well as specific business initiatives that could be made in Sarawak.

He also visited Serba DigitalX in Kota Samarahan, an up-and-coming incubation centre which has taken up Abang Johari's call for a digital Sarawak.



MUNIR (sixth right) flanked by Raja (seventh right) and Ismail with attendees of the dialogue session yesterday.