

Lahad Datu considered for seaweed, tuna processing

LAHAD DATU: Seaweed and tuna processing are being considered here, as parties in Sabah and the Philippines explore the aggregation of raw materials from surrounding territories.

These were among preliminary conclusions at the close of a visit here on Wednesday by a business delegation from the Tawi Tawi Province of the Philippines.

Interests have also been expressed on barter trade, import of edible oil and possibly the introduction of ferry and air services between here and Bongao, the capital city of Tawi Tawi.

The group, led by Tawi Tawi Governor Ysmael Sali, arrived in Sabah on October 11 on a five-day visit. The aim of the official trip

was to visit POIC Lahad Datu.

"They are looking at using POIC Lahad Datu as a place to consolidate seaweed and other marine resources with a view to produce downstream products for export," said Carl Mosoom, the chairman of the BIMP-EAGA Business Council, Sabah chapter, who has been a major conduit between potential business partners on both sides.

Meanwhile, POIC Sabah Chairman Datuk Seri Panglima Yong Teck Lee sees the dawning of a new era in ties between Sabah and southern Philippines.

"I always held the view that both sides can support each other in addressing issues along our common border. We are BIMP-EAGA partners and neighbours and the Governor's

visit will cement and strengthen our ties on the basis of 'win-win' and smart partnership."

Yong said BIMP-EAGA has been within POIC Sabah's plan in the beginning as a source for all sorts of raw materials from palm oil, cocoa and seafood.

"We recently also broached the idea of developing an international maritime centre at POIC Lahad Datu and a new airport to improve sea and air connectivity."

Tawi Tawi covers more than 300 islands and atolls. It has a population with over 400,000 about 80% of whom are connected to the value chain of seaweed, making the province the biggest seaweed producer in the Philippines. The seas in the south of Philippines are also

famously known for their rich marine resources, supporting at least two sizable tuna factories, one each in Zamboanga and General Santos.

A spokesman for the Tawi Tawi delegation said POIC's deep sea harbour, comprehensive port infrastructure, industrial land and strategic location along the Lombok-Makassar shipping lane have attracted businesses in BARMM seeking to expand. Among them is the Mindanao Development Authority, the official development agency of BARMM.

The delegates wrapped up their visit with a tour of the Kota Kinabalu Industrial Park on Thursday, and meeting with Tan Sri Pandikar Amin Mulia, Sabah's Special Envoy to BIMP-EAGA.