Become lifelong learners to survive Industry 4.0, says minister

James Kon

The most important role for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is to prepare the workforce to learn and incultate new knowledge with the rapid changes taking place today, Minister of Education Dato Seri Setia Awang Haji Hamzah bin Haji Sulaiman said.

"The key to survive in Industry 4.0 is the ability to become lifelong learners or otherwise risk becoming an illiterate workforce," the minister said as the guest of honour at the 5th High Officials Meeting of SEA-TVET at The Centrepoint Hotel in Gadong yesterday.

In its continuous efforts to enhance the quality of TVET teachers, Brunei Darussalam emphasized on establishing the Brunei TVET teacher standards (BTS) which is aligned with SEAMEO's Regional TVET teacher standard. The Brunei TVET teacher standard provides a guideline on the essential competencies and skills for teachers that comprehensively prepare students for their transition to employment in the 21st Century.

The minister also stressed on the importance to further enhance skills and competencies of TVET teachers and trainers.

The minister said, "Brunei Darussalam has carefully sequenced strategies and initiatives to improve access to lifelong learning to enable the workforce, especially mid-career people, to upgrade these skills through our inclusive education policy. This aims to provide equal and equitable access to quality learning for all."

He said TVET should be ready to embrace technological transformation as it will affect the way TVET prepares the future workforce where the importance of cognitive abilities and system skills over physical abilities is becoming more prevalent.

"Training programmes will have to keep pace with industrial trends and developments to stay relevant in the future. This can be achieved by enhancing the quality and relevance of TVET through well planned strategic initiatives such as curriculum upgrades, teachers' training and promoting lifelong learning," Dato Seri Setia Awang Haji Hamzah said.

He added, "Brunei Darussalam has transformed its TVET system by repositioning Politeknik Brunei (PB) and also consolidating TVET schools to come under the Institute of Brunei Technical Education (IBTE). This move is seen as crucial as the new governance structure allows both PB and IBTE to be responsive and to stay relevant to the social and economic demands of the 21st Century."

He said one important aspect for an effective TVET is the curriculum.

Throughout the years, much focus has been placed on the curriculum to ensure the development of students' practical skills and that institutional programmes meet the industrial standards and also produce job-ready graduates. However, TVET 4.0 poses new challenges as it requires curriculum to be more responsive and adaptive, he said.

"This traditional fixed curriculum and linear learning may no longer be relevant to our 21st Century students. To achieve this, it is vital that we ensure continuous curriculum upgrading remains at the forefront of the strategic plans of both PB and IBTE as we strive for quality TVET," he said.

He believed that the meeting is a good platform to discuss the current collaborative works and the strategies to further enhance regional cooperation as well as to determine the directions and to improve responsiveness of TVET in Southeast Asian countries towards Industry 4.0.

Priority for TVET in SE Asia's education development

James Kon

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has been highlighted and identified in many regional ministerial and high officials meetings as one of the priority areas in education development in the Southeast Asian region for 20 years until 2035, South East Asian Ministries of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) Secretariat Director Dr Ethel Agnes P.Valenzuela said.

Delivering the welcoming remarks at the 5th High Officials Meeting of SEA-TVET at The Centrepoint Hotel yesterday, she said beginning from the first high official meeting on SEA-TVET organised in August 2015, various national and regional initiatives in TVET have been co-created and co-developed among Southeast Asian countries and development agencies.

Dr Ethel said this was done among others to advance the quality of TVET education in various aspects and to improve the internationalisation and harmonisation of TVET institutions in Southeast Asia.

A total of 150 participants gathered for the 5th High Officials Meeting of SEA-TVET themed 'Strengthening Efforts Towards TVET 4.0' which continues until today.

Minister of Education Dato Seri Setia Awang Haji Hamzah bin Haji Sulaiman officiated the opening ceremony as the guest of honour.

Dr Ethel also praised the Ministry of Education for selecting the theme 'Strengthening Efforts towards TVET 4.0' for this year's meeting.

Twelve regional initiatives for TVET development in Southeast Asia will be presented at the second session.

Leading the Brunei delegation was Permanent Secretary (Higher Education) at the Ministry of Education Dr Haji Aiman bin Haji Ahmad. Officers from higher education institutions and ministries, SEAMEO member countries including Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor Leste and Vietnam as well as associate members of Japan, Korea, Germany, Great Britain, China, the United States and UNESCO as well as the International Labour Organization are also participating.

The topics of discussion during the meetings are Country's Initiatives in Strengthening Efforts Towards TVET 4.0, Regional Initiatives for TVET Development in Southeast Asia by Development Agencies, Skills Development for TVET 4.0 as well as Public-Private Partnership model towards TVET 4.0.

Following the opening ceremony, a press conference was held to explain about the meeting. The press conference was chaired by the SEAMEO Secretariat Director, SEAMEO Centre Director Dr Haji Mohd Zami bin Haji Sabil, Politeknik Brunei Director Denia Ho Mun Tai, and Ministry of Education International Affairs Unit Head Walter Chong Meng Siong.

The meeting aimed to discuss the collaborative development for 2018 to 2019 and identify strategies to raise cooperation and harmony in the region.

Participants at the meeting also look towards plans and strategies to improve the quality of TVET in Southeast Asian countries to raise the competitiveness of member countries for Industry 4.0 and to strengthen cooperation among agencies of ministries and departments in relation to TVET among countries in Southeast Asia with other countries.

(See also Page 11)