

Govt hoping to start phase two of BBEC program

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KOTA KINABALU: The State Government is considering to implement the second phase of the Bornean Biodiversity and Ecosystems Conservation (BBEC) program following the completion of the first phase by 2007.

Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman said consideration on the second phase was made following the successful run of the first phase which commenced in 2002.

"After the first BBEC program, the State Government is hoping for a phase two which would focus more on marine studies," he told reporters after officiating the 4th BBEC International Conference at the **Universiti Malaysia Sabah** yesterday.

Musa said the Government is very grateful to the Japanese Government, especially its Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) for their successful collaboration in the BBEC program.

The program was very beneficial to the State and it had created public awareness on the conservation of the State's biodiversity, he said.

According to Musa, on his official visit to Japan last year, he had requested its Government if the BBEC program could be extended.

"I was made to understand that since the collaboration was successful, the Japanese Government think that it is enough for Sabah and will bring the program to other countries such as Africa," he said.

"However, we will still continue the program on our own way (and) I'm sure the Japanese Government and other agencies will assist," he said.

In his speech earlier, Musa said the State and Federal Governments continue to accord high priority to the conservation of natural environment as it is known to many that Sabah is blessed with a

remarkable biodiversity and ranks amongst the great biodiversity centers in the world.

Where BBEC is concerned, the Government is thankful to JICA for extending their cooperation in its conservation efforts, he said and added that the unique nature of the program is its comprehensiveness whereby many sectors are involved and recognized as vital stakeholders to the issue of conservation.

"To UMS, Sabah Parks, Sabah Wildlife Department and the Science and Technology Unit which have worked hand in hand to make the program a reality, I am indeed proud of your achievements," he said.

Musa expressed his hope that through the conference, weaknesses can be evaluated and deliberation made on what more can be done in this last year to make sure the BBEC program is successful and has met all of its aspirations and objectives.