

MOHE Encourages New Academic Programmes to Enhance Higher Education in Sabah

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Kuala Lumpur: The Higher Education Ministry (MOHE) is open to applications for new academic programmes at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), polytechnics, and community colleges in Sabah to broaden study options at public higher education institutions (IPTA) in the state. Minister Datuk Seri Dr Zambry Abdul Kadir emphasized that each application would be assessed based on key criteria, including institutional expertise, industry needs, delivery capacity, student demand, and graduate employability, while avoiding duplication of programmes among IPTAs.

According to BERNAMA News Agency, this approach aims to ensure the programmes offered are of quality, relevant, and aligned with Sabah's economic development needs, while optimising existing expertise and resources. Dr Zambry made these remarks during the Minister's Question Time in the Dewan Rakyat in response to a query from Mohd Kurniawan Naim Moktar (BN-Kinabatangan) regarding measures to increase the capacity and diversity of IPTA programmes in Sabah.

Dr Zambry reiterated MOHE's commitment to expanding higher education opportunities in Sabah to ensure local students have wider access to quality programmes without having to depend solely on institutions in Peninsular Malaysia. He noted that until June 30, a total of 16 IPTAs, including branch campuses, were operating in Sabah, offering various programmes. These include four public universities, three polytechnics, and nine community colleges.

In detailing the specific course offerings, Dr Zambry highlighted that UMS and its branch campuses were developing programmes based on research strengths and Borneo's unique geography and biodiversity. Fields such as marine science and aquaculture, tropical biotechnology, medical sciences, heritage and social sciences, and ecotourism and business are among the focus areas. At Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Sabah Branch, programmes focus on tourism and hospitality, business, administrative sciences, and science and technology.

To support higher education capacity, MOHE is implementing 21 development projects in Sabah at a cost of RM1.05 billion, with RM160.6 million allocated under the First Rolling Plan of the 13th Malaysia Plan (13MP) for 2026. Dr Zambry clarified that the ministry did not set specific quotas for higher education placements, as student admission depends on the courses offered by universities and demand.

Addressing concerns about programme availability, Dr Zambry stated, 'We cannot simply set a target, such as 80 per cent of programmes being offered in Sabah, as some courses are also available elsewhere, particularly in Peninsular Malaysia and Sarawak.' Nevertheless, he assured that the ministry continues to plan for better access through niche-based approaches, such as law programmes, given the strong need in Sabah and Sarawak.

In response to a supplementary question from Dr Halimah Ali (PN-Kapar), Dr Zambry mentioned that the government provides funding through MOHE and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation to support university research activities. He noted that many research projects had produced positive outcomes, including those under RDICE (Research, Development, Innovation, Commercialisation and Economy Programme), which focuses on research with commercial value.