

UMS to have special educational programmes for American students

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KOTA KINABALU: Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) will be working closely with the US Embassy in Kuala Lumpur on a special educational programme for American undergraduates.

UMS Deputy Vice Chancellor (Student Affairs and Alumni) Datuk Kasim Md Mansur said the programme could be carried out during summer holidays when students in the US would be off school.

"I studied in the US for more than ten years. So I know that during the summer holidays, for two to three months, students generally spend their time going places all over the world.

"We will work out a formula so that these students could come to Sabah and UMS will arrange the accommodations and schedules for them.

"Any activities they undertake while they were here could be counted into their credit hours towards their graduations," he said in his opening remark during the US Ambassador to Malaysia Joseph Y. Yun's visit to the university on Tuesday.

He added that the university welcomes and is willing to host US student researchers to undertake their research in relevant fields at the institution.

"The university and the embassy could work together to identify research areas that may be of interest to American students.

"This had been done in other local universities in the country. So it is my hope that the same arrangement can be made in both Sabah and Sarawak as well," he said.

During the visit, Yun presented UMS with a book collection entitled 'Library of America Series' which comprises 100 American literature books including poems, novels, essays, drama and other American works from America's best writers.

Kasim said the gift is an excellent example of on-going collaboration between the United States and Malaysia and hoped that the embassy and UMS could collaborate further in more activities in the future.

"At one level, our library could strengthen its cooperation with the Lincoln Resource Centre by having information exchange through loans of materials or programmes.

"For example, we could also provide our books and materials on Sabah on loan to the centre in Kuala Lumpur for their users and vice-versa. The library could also organise activities around American themed literary works or other topics that may be of interest to the community such as economic cooperation,

regional security and so on," he said.

Meanwhile, in his speech, Yun who had just assumed the position as ambassador to Malaysia in September this year said he realised that both the US and Malaysia share a lot of similarities.

"We are both multi-ethnic and we discuss these things fairly openly like what race we belong to and the problems we face. Secondly, we are also multi-religious. I think more than anywhere else in Sabah, I can see there are many different groups of religion that live and co-exist very happily alongside each other.

"But it doesn't mean neither you nor we don't have problems. I think, certainly, we recognise especially after 9/11, there are prejudices, and there will always be prejudices. In the US, there was a pastor going around burning Qurans. That was a very, controversial case.

"Similarly here, again when you have religions that are side by side, you're going to have issues. But again, we do discuss them and we aim for tolerance," he said.

Yun added that both countries have lessons to learn from each other and obviously, there is lots of room for improvement.

He also said that both countries enjoy openness in trade, economy, politics and democracy despite the various disputes and arguments.

"But we are trying to settle them within our system and the way we do things. For me, my job is to discover how to take our similarities and build a better relationship between the two countries," he said.

Yun stated that the US is currently enjoying better relationship with Malaysia under Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

"I feel lucky to have come to Malaysia at this time when Washington is talking openly about 'rebalance to Asia', that we are paying more attention to Asia. In many ways, things are aligning well," he said.

Commenting on the book collection presented to UMS, Yun described the collection as 'timeless classics' and hoped that the collection will add more varieties to the current collection of the university's library.

UMS library is one of the major libraries in the State besides the Sabah State Library.

Currently, its collection of books stands at 420,500 volumes spreading over three campuses in Kota Kinabalu, Labuan and Sandakan. In addition, the library also provides research facilities in the form of searchable on-line journals, electronic books and data.

The books and facilities are available for use not only to the staff and students of the university but also to the public.

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