

OPENING SPEECH
YBHG DATO MAIMUNAH MOHD SHARIF
PRESIDENT MUNICIPAL COUNCIL OF SEBERANG PERAI
SEBERANG PERAI INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
ECOTOURISM AND CONSERVATION EFFORTS
THE LIGHT HOTEL
24 NOVEMBER 2016 (THURSDAY)

Honorable Mr Lim Guan Eng

Chief Minister of Penang

Honorable Dato' Mohd Rashid Bin Hasnon

Deputy Chief Minister of Penang (I)

Prof. Dr Ramasamy S/O Palanisamy

Deputy Chief Minister of Penang (II)

Members of Penang State Executive Council (EXCO)

Members of Penang State Legislative Assembly (ADUN)

Councillors of Municipal Council of Seberang Perai

Sr Hj Rozali bin Hj Mohamud

Secretary of Municipal Council of SeberangPerai

Distinguished Speakers and Guests

Member of Media

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamualaikum and very good evening.

Seberang Perai is proud to welcome the speakers and the delegates attending the first ever Seberang Perai International Conference on Ecotourism and Conservation Efforts (SPICEC) 2016 hosted by the Municipal Council of Seberang Perai. It is also the first time Seberang Perai hosting an international conference, featuring expert speakers from various countries, namely Malaysia, The Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, The United States, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

It is no secret that Seberang Perai aspiring to become an International City and continuously taking efforts to become one. Our efforts have been met with recognition not only within Malaysia, but also in international level. We can proudly say that we are the first local government in Malaysia to become the member of International Council of Local Environment

Initiatives (ICLEI) in 2014. We are not limiting our boundaries to solid waste management, town planning and licensing alone, but always look at the bigger picture and expand our capacity to become a world class city. We have expressed our commitment for sustainability in many possible ways. SPICEC 2016, is one such way to express our commitment. I can assure you that, such efforts will not stop here and will continue in years to come.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Tourism is considered as a sector that can contribute to the three pillars of sustainability, namely economy, social and environment. With our commitment for sustainability, we decided to embrace ecotourism as our main tourism product, not only for it's economic value, but for the positive impact on the nature itself. In 2012, United Nations General Assembly had recognized the ecotourism as a key for poverty eradication and protection of the environment. That is the answer for the question, "Why Seberang Perai chose ecotourism?"

Although tourism is not our core business, we in Municipal Council of Seberang Perai are putting our effort to make Seberang Perai a world class tourist destination. With increasing number of tourists to Penang, Seberang Perai didn't want to lose the economy from the tourism industry. Considering the fact that Georgetown able to attract more tourists since being listed as UNESCO World Heritage Site, MPSP chose to promote the natural heritage of the Penang's mainland. It is not easy for a local government to initiate campaigns to promote tourism products, as our resources are limited. Hence, we formed a Tourism Taskforce in MPSP comprising Government agencies related to the tourism industry to discuss the strategies to promote tourists destination in Seberang Perai. With the formation of the Seberang Perai Tourism Task Force, we managed to identify potential tourist destinations in Seberang Perai. In the last two years we managed to publish 3 versions of Seberang Perai Tourist Map, Seberang Perai Heritage Map and Coffee Table Book.

While many of the Seberang Perai folks themselves are unaware, the mangrove forests in North Seberang Perai has been a famous destination for avi-tourists from East Asia, namely Korea and Japan. Annually there are tourists visiting the Air Itam Dalam Educational Forest in Lahar Yooi, to

enjoy the natural view and to click away the pictures of rarest species of migratory birds. The green atmosphere can enhance anyone who loves the nature. Beside Air Itam Dalam, the coastal are along Teluk Air Tawar-Kuala Muda and Pulau Burung in South Seberang Perai are the other areas famous among the local and international avi-tourists. If developed and promoted carefully, these places will certainly attract more nature lovers from various part of the world.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Chief Minister and the Penang State Government for their continuous support for our efforts to promote ecotourism and conserve the nature. I would like to give an example that Teluk Air Tawar – Kuala Muda coastal area was identified as Important Bird Area, which being the house for thousands of migratory birds from the east. The Penang State Government has agreed to to take into account that these are as a protected mangrove forest reserve, considering the eco-sensitivity of the area in the study of the review of state structure plan. This shows the State's commitment towards environment and Seberang Perai. The Teluk Air Tawar-Kuala Muda Coastal area will be carefully developed as a ecotourism destination, without disturbing the

originality and the eco-sensitivity of the mangrove forest. Consequently, we can also proceed to apply to the RAMSAR status for the area in future.

Ladies and Gentleman,

Today's conference is not only about featuring Seberang Perai as an ecotourism destination, but also an avenue to create a forum for local governments in Malaysia and ASEAN to share ideas and work towards nature conservation by mainstreaming the ecotourism industry. In the first session of the conference, the expert speakers will speak about the ecotourism industry in the region and its potentiality; in the second session, the expert speakers will speak on how the ecotourism can stimulate nature conservation efforts and in the final session the speakers will speak about the potentiality of the avi-tourism or bird watching tourism. I hope the conference will be useful avenue for all the delegates who are keen to develop their knowledge in ecotourism and nature conservation. We are looking forward to play a role in the development of the ecotourism industry in the region and believe SPICEC 2016 will pave a way for that. With the strong support of the Penang State Government and cooperation of

international agencies like ICLEI, I believe Seberang Perai can become a major ecotourism development destination.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Conservation of the nature becomes a necessity while the world is facing climate change. Climate change is definitely not a hoax, and everyone should play their role to fight the global warming. Development of ecotourism will have positive impact on the climate change, as the experts noted. The only choice the tourism industry players have at the moment is, to mainstream the ecotourism. Ecotourism is no longer a dull subject. It is about the time we give importance to the ecotourism, as a tool to conserve the nature and empower the local communities. This is in line MPSP's commitment in Compact Mayor in Paris 2015 to be with the 604 cities around the world who are committed to fight against the global warming under the "Global covenant of mayors for climate and energy". We can proudly say that Seberang Perai is the only city that signed in COP21 Paris Agreement. When it comes climate change, we have never backtracked from our commitment. So the fight against global warming starts with us, start at home and start with the local authorities like MPSP and start with

you and me in this hall. We are doing our part to achieve Cleaner, Greener, Safer, Healthier and Happier Seberang Perai.

With that hope and today's conference will benefit all the attendees, I thank all of you again for your presence.

Thank You.