

## Masing: Various programmes taken to consolidate, upgrade port facilities

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Tan Sri Datuk Amar Dr James Jemut Masing – File photo

SIBU: Sarawak is embarking on various development programmes to consolidate and upgrade its ports' facilities to attract transshipment cargoes.

Minister of infrastructure and Ports Development Tan Sri Datuk Amar Dr James Jemut Masing said his ministry is currently reviewing the State Port Laws together with the State Attorney-General to enhance the efficiency and as part of the modernisation plans of the ports.

"Upon completion, a ship's stay in port will be shorter and turn-around time will be reduced, thereby making the ports attractive transshipment hubs.

"This will benefit the shippers, exporters and importers who will gain from the reduced port costs at lower maritime freight rates, allowing lower cost of imported goods and intermediate products and enhanced competitiveness for exports.

"Consumers will also benefit from lower prices of consumer goods and better access to wider range of products through improved access and increased competition between suppliers," he stated when addressing at the Sarawak and Sabah Shipowners Association (SSSA)'s 40th anniversary dinner at a leading hotel here on Saturday.

Masing, who is also Deputy Chief Minister, called upon ship owners in Sarawak and Sabah to brace for the digital transformation that is impacting all sectors of the economy as the state enters the 4th industrial revolution.

He said his ministry is keen to cooperate closely with the association to develop the shipping industry in terms of skills, infrastructure and to attract more business to the ports in Sarawak and neighbouring state of Sabah.

He said the digital revolution is shaping the maritime and shipping industry in every aspect and all its segments through modern ships design and new technologies.

Like in any technical revolution, he said there are many who still have not fully understood and fully embraced all the real and concrete opportunities and advantages digitalisation can bring.

"Now is not the time to be sceptical but the time to embrace change and the competitive advantage digital technology can bring. Remember, changes don't start with the ship, but with leadership," he pointed out.

International shipping is responsible for the carriage of around 90 per cent of world trade, he said, adding shipping is the life blood of the global economy.

"Our shipping industry as well as trade is placed within the contact of this dynamic region of vast economic opportunities.

"You are as important as any sector in the economy to strengthen the chain of growth and progress. The government, through my ministry, will provide business friendly environment to spur the development and growth of our shipping industry which our state, Sarawak, heavily depends on.

"Being an island state, Sarawak needs an efficient transport system to facilitate the movement of goods from across the seas to Sarawak ports," he said.

According to him, global trade will continue to grow with movement of goods from places of supplies to places of demand and shipping will continue to play a major role in the transfer of goods from one place to another.

Therefore, he called upon shipping players to position themselves to take advantage of these opportunities.

Secretary-general of Malaysia Shipowners' Association (MASA) Shaharuzzaman Baharum, Sibu Resident Charles Siaw and chairman of SSSA Eddie Ling Soon King were among those present.