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ASPAC 2014 Conference Officially Launched by Minister of Education

The 14th Annual Asia Pacific Network of Science and Technology Centres Conference (ASPAC 2014) was officially launched this morning by Yang Berhormat Pehin Orang Kaya Seri Kerna Dato Seri Setia Hj Awg Abu Bakar bin Hj Apong, Minister of Education, Negara Brunei Darussalam.

ASPAC 2014 is sponsored by Brunei Shell Petroleum Company Sdn Bhd and supported by the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Development, Ministry of Culture, Youth & Sports and Institut Teknologi Brunei, with The Brunei Times as the Conference's official Media Partner. More than 130 participants from Asia-Pacific countries have registered for ASPAC 2014, and they include CEOs, Directors, officials from science centres and museums, researchers, school leaders and educators.

The annual Conference serves as an avenue for science educators, learners, science centres and policy makers to meet, network, share information and do business with industry partners in the region and beyond. The Oil & Gas Discovery Centre (OGDC) is hosting the ASPAC 2014, themed *"Building a Community Through Science"* from 5th to 8th May 2014 at the OGDC and Empire Hotel and Country Club. The theme focuses the Conference discussions on inspiring a science literate society, inspiring science learning curriculum and the existence of Science Centres as a source of Science, Technology and Innovation for young minds.

Referring to the theme of the Conference, Yang Berhormat Pehin in his opening speech stated, *"The presence of science centres is something that is highly valued by any community and can transform the landscape of a community in many ways - physically, socially, educationally and culturally. They undeniably serve as educational resources for K-12 faculty and students and as a destination for the greater community"*.

At this conference, the delegates have the opportunity to attend and participate in several different activities and discussions such as the ASPAC plenary session by invited speakers, parallel sharing sessions, ASPAC CEO Session, Trade and Science Shows. Additionally, for the first time ever, a nationwide science outreach initiative to schools will be conducted by overseas ASPAC members in all four districts, impacting close to 2,000 students and teachers from over 160 schools. This outreach will portray various fun and innovative ways of engaging students and getting them interested in science and technology, thus bringing science alive within the community. It will also create an opportunity for the local students and educators to experience the wonders of science through different perspectives. The science outreach will be conducted by presenters from Petrosains Malaysia, National Science Museum Thailand, Pusat Sains Negara Malaysia, Scitech Australia, Australian National University and Oil and Gas Discovery Centre (OGDC).

Yang Berhormat Pehin also remarked, *“The intrinsic and public relations value of networking between schools, communities and sciences centres cannot be underestimated. It is no small coincidence then that ASPAC 2014 is featuring a dynamic new format of having ASPAC delegates, both locals and from overseas, conduct a series of science outreach programmes to students in all the 4 districts of Brunei. The freshness of this approach combined with the highly anticipated nature of the science shows have helped to attract a diverse pool of students and educators, and will involve more than 160 schools and impact nearly 2,000 students of all ages”.*

At the opening ceremony, Dr. Emlyn Koster, Director of North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, United States, also delivered a keynote speech on “The Journeys of Our Institutions from Nice to Necessary”. In his keynote speech, he stated that societal progress and environmental stewardship are the world’s most pressing needs, but that these also stimulate opportunities for science-driven innovation.

After the official launching of ASPAC 2014, the Minister of Education was given a tour of the Trade Show that is also part of the Conference. Participants in the Trade Show included The Mind Museum from the Philippines, Natural History Museum from London, Singapore Science Centre, Aurea Exhibition from Argentina, Sigong Tech & Dalian Hoffen Bio-Technique Co. Ltd from Korea and Kurt Huttering GMBH & Co. KG from Germany. Most of the exhibitors showcased their latest and most attractive projects and exhibitions related to Science, Technology and Innovative Learning.

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