

Fixing Sabah's financial sinkholes

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By: David Thien

Kota Kinabalu: State Attorney-General Datuk Brenndon Keith Soh said the Sabah Government is very concerned about the loss-making Government-linked companies (GLCs) which have been likened to being "sinkholes".

He said State Finance Minister Datuk Seri Masidi Manjun is overseeing the matter.

These GLCs are among 250 that have a primary commercial business development or socio-economic objective and in which the State Government has a direct controlling stake or in a joint-venture stake with a private sector partner(s).

Brendon said any document of a Sabah GLC or statutory bodies that want to enter into a business agreement with any party have to get the approval of the State Cabinet, after being vetted by his Chamber, besides other relevant authorities.

"This was a recent guideline," Soh said at the Sabah Action Body Advocating Rights (Sabar) Town Hall session on Good Governance on Saturday moderated by former Sabah Law Society President Datuk Roger Chin and Sabar organiser Lim Hock Song.

"Any agreement that needs to be approved between the GLC and third party has to go through my State AG's Chambers.

"I assure you that I will not let any lopsided agreement through. It is a privilege to serve the State, which is not an entitlement. And I have to look out for what is in the best interests of the State. And the State's interests come first," Soh stressed.

Soh said the State Cabinet has formed an Oversight Committee for GLCs co-chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Sabah Ministry of Finance and the independent financial advisor to the Chief Minister, Siaw Kok Chee, who was a banker.

Among members of the committee are a senior lawyer and a partner of one of the global big four audit firms.

"They are giving their views and inputs. This is a progressive initiative to address the issue," Soh said. He stressed that the Oversight Committee has Cabinet authority to analyse, investigate any GLC and obtain all financial information required for the probe. Full discourse.

"We recognise that this is part of good governance. We need check-and-balance, oversight, accountability and transparency.

“At the end of the day, if there is bad news, we cannot hide it. We have to be frank and open, otherwise we are culpable ourselves.

He said SMJ Energy S/B is a GLC that should be emulated by others where good governance is concerned.

Earlier, former banker and Sabah Economic Advisory Council (SEAC) advisor, Datuk John Lo, posed the question, “Can Sabah afford for the GLCs to continue with the endless poor performance, financial losses, abuses and misgovernance?”

“Of course, GLCs can be turned around,” Lo said, and he was glad that the Oversight Committee was formed with the right people appointed in place in some GLCs.

“Every Sabahan man, woman and every voter, after listening to Sabar’s podcasts, should demand from politicians, reformation, transformation and rationalisation of Sabah’s GLCs.

“The economic and financial cost of non-performing GLC is excessively high on all Sabahans.

Sabar’s highlighting of Sabah’s GLCs will benefit all Sabahans,” Lo said.

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"Sabah Voices to Action - Shaping Sabah's Future Together" is a citizen-driven, non-partisan initiative running from March to June 2025, dedicated to amplifying Sabahans' voices, fostering meaningful discussions, and shaping policies on education, healthcare, public infrastructure, and good governance.

Join the Movement:

<https://www.sabar.org.my/action/#join-movement>

Podcast Channel:

<https://youtube.com/@kopitiamcouncil>

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Website: <https://sabar.org.my/action/>

Email: action@sabar.org.my

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Together, we can build a stronger, more inclusive Sabah!

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Free university degrees for S'wakians starting 2026

KUCHING: Sarawakian workers who wish to pursue full-time undergraduate studies will have the opportunity to do so next year, said Premier Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Abang Johari Tun Openg (pic).

He said the Sarawak government will fully sponsor higher education for eligible Sarawakians who choose to enrol in state-owned higher learning institutions as part of its broader goal to strengthen human capital through lifelong learning.

"We are serious about building our talent pool, which is why we are investing in free higher education for our people starting in 2026.

"I am not making empty promises. I have already secured the funds for this initiative and the Sarawak government will pay for the education.

"All you need to do is just focus on studying to upgrade your skills," he said when officiating the Sarawak-level Workers' Day celebration at Hikmah Exchange Convention Centre here today.

In addition to providing free tertiary education to students starting next year,



lence Sarawak.

Later at a press conference, the Premier explained that financial support will be provided as long as the applicants meet the basic eligibility criteria namely that they must hold the 'K' status in their MyKad to prove that they are Sarawakians, be enrolled as full-time students, and are accepted to pursue their studies at the higher-learning institution.

"Yes, the education will be completely free. As long as the applicant is accepted by the university and registered as a full-time student, we will cover the costs.

"There is no age limit. Even if you are 60 years old, you can still apply, as long as you have the 'K' status," he confirmed.

He, however, noted that this initiative does not extend to those who wish to pursue Distance Learning (PJJ).

"PJJ is not covered. It must be full-time studies. If you are working and wish to study part-time through PJJ, it will not be covered.

"We are focusing on those who wish to