

## Education the focus of Sabar's debut podcasts

Daily Express, Wed 19 March 2025

KOTA KINABALU: The Sabah Action Body Advocating Rights (Sabar), in collaboration with the Kopitiam Council Podcast, will launch the first two episodes of the "Sabah Voices to Action" podcast on Thursday and Friday.

The eight-part series delves into issues such as education, healthcare, public infrastructure and good governance, offering a platform for expert discussions and grassroots engagement to drive informed policymaking that addresses Sabah's most pressing concerns.

The debut series would focus on Sabah's education challenges and the need for policy reforms. It features educator Frederick Leyong Soh Andu and early childhood specialist Sonia Chin, who explores science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education and early childhood learning in Sabah.

They highlight the obstacles in cultivating a robust STEM workforce, including students' reluctance to pursue STEM subjects due to their perceived difficulty.

Chin will speak about the importance of early STEM exposure, particularly in rural areas where access to quality preschool education is limited.

She said integrating STEM concepts through play-based learning helps children build confidence in science and mathematics. Leyong discussed the role of the Dual Language Programme (DLP) in STEM education, noting that studying technical subjects in English prepares students for a competitive job market.

However, inconsistent DLP implementation, teacher shortages, outdated school infrastructure and limited digital access continue to hinder STEM progress in the State.

Both speakers advocate for increased investment in teacher training, digital infrastructure, and STEM outreach initiatives to ensure Sabah's students are well-prepared for a technology-driven future.

The second episode, featuring Datuk Hanafiah Mohd Kassim and Professor Vincent Pang, examines Sabah's education autonomy and access to quality education.

While the 2021 constitutional amendment reaffirming MA63 marked progress toward greater autonomy, challenges remain in fully implementing policies tailored to Sabah's unique needs. A 2024 World Bank report revealed that 20pc of Sabah's rural students lack a secondary school within a five-km radius, compared to just five per cent in the peninsula.

The discussion also addresses the growing crisis of stateless and undocumented children, with over 800,000 individuals denied access to formal education.

While NGOs and community learning centres provide some support, consistent funding and stronger government backing could significantly enhance education opportunities.

Both speakers pointed out the urgent need for greater local involvement in curriculum development, increased government support for alternative education models, and digital expansion to bridge rural education gaps. They also call for legal reforms to ensure all children, regardless of legal status, can access basic education.

The Sabah Voices to Action podcast would be available on the Kopitiam Council YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/@kopitiamcouncil>), with new episodes released every two weeks.

In addition to the podcast, a special column in Daily Express will provide expert insights and policy recommendations related to each episode.

Sabahans are encouraged to follow the column for in-depth analysis and updates.

Beyond the podcast, town hall meetings would be held in Kota Kinabalu, Sandakan, Tawau, Kota Marudu, Keningau and Lahad Datu throughout April and May, offering communities a platform to voice their concerns and propose policy solutions.

A final policy conference in June would consolidate these discussions into a Memorandum of Sabah Priorities, which would be submitted to political leaders ahead of the 2025 State Election.

The public is encouraged to watch the podcast, read the articles and join the discussion by recommending solutions through Sabar's Sabah Voices to Action website (<https://www.sabar.org.my/action>), Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/sabar.org>), and Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/sabar.org.my/>), where updates on the podcast series, articles, town hall schedules and news would also be shared.

Meanwhile, the Sabah Voices to Action team earlier briefed Datuk Seri Hajiji Noor on their initiative to involve the voices of Sabahans in shaping State policies on Monday.

Led by Datuk Zainie Abdul Aucasa, Trustee and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Sabar, they briefed the Chief Minister on the multi-platform approach of the Voices initiative. "Our goal is to compile recommendations that will be presented to parties ahead of the 2025 Sabah Election," said Zainie.

"This initiative provides a structured channel for the rakyat to voice their concerns and aspirations, fostering inclusivity and active participation in governance," he added.

The delegation also provided updates on ongoing legal challenges concerning Sabah's constitutional rights. Roland Cheng spoke on Sabar's legal challenge regarding Sabah's continental shelf and territorial seas, noting that legal standing had been granted to Sabar. Efforts to retrieve historical documents from British archives are underway to strengthen Sabah's position.

Datuk Roger Chin provided a briefing on the SLS 40 per cent legal action, reaffirming the legal basis for Sabah's constitutional entitlements and updating the CM on the case's progress. The meeting highlighted the importance of collaborative efforts between the Government and advocacy groups in safeguarding Sabah's rights and advancing the interests of its people.

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Sabar officials during the meeting with Hajiji.

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