

Making Borneo an education hub for sustainable development

ON these coming weekends, practitioners and researchers in the region will gather at Sunway University to exchange experiences, research findings, and ideas on how cities in Asean can achieve sustainable development by creating spaces for education, research, and innovation.

Premier Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Abang Johari Tun Openg is invited as a keynote speaker to share the experience of Sarawak's cities in pursuing sustainable development. It seems that Borneo will be one of the key regions in focus in the near future for a number of reasons.

I am always intrigued by the idea of making Borneo a regional education hub. The island is blessed with a remarkable combination of natural and cultural wonders. Its lush rainforests and rich biodiversity are a priceless treasure for biologists and ecologists.

Here, researchers and students can study the complexity of ecosystems from mangroves to highlands, experience the intricate interactions between different species, and even discover new species and phenomena.

The eastern coast of Borneo faces the coral triangle, which is broadly known as the 'global centre of marine biodiversity', and can be considered a perfect site for establishing research and education centres for marine sciences.

The opportunities to gain field and hands-on experience make Borneo a potential prime destination for natural and environmental science education.

In addition to its natural advantages, Borneo is also home to numerous indigenous and migrant communities with unique cultures, traditions, and histories.

The complex interactions between different



Exploring Sustainable Development

with Dr Goh Chun Sheng

communities and the evolution of different cultures, with its colourful history of encounters of civilisations and nation-building, offer exciting opportunities to learn about the multiple aspects of human civilisations.

I still remember the thrill of seeing and learning about the Kaharingan religion of the Dayak people in Central Kalimantan, which contains Hindu elements. Furthermore, researchers and students from anthropology and archaeology may also immerse themselves in the presence of archaeological and cultural sites like the Niah Cave Complex.

There has also been substantial investment in research and educational facilities in Borneo. Sarawak now boasts world-class research centres like Sarawak Biodiversity Centre (SBC) and Sarawak Tropical Peat Research Institute, which offer advanced research opportunities and state-of-the-art facilities for studying a wide range of frontier and emerging research topics.

Borneo's unique combination of natural and cultural asset offers special kinds of opportunities in interdisciplinary research, such as analysing and documenting indigenous knowledge on biodiversity by SBC using advanced biotechnology, as mentioned in the earlier article.

And what better place to learn more about tourism than Borneo, given its exceptional blend of natural and cultural



Sarawak now boasts world-class research centres like Sarawak Biodiversity Centre (SBC) and Sarawak Tropical Peat Research Institute (pictured above).

marvels? I can never forget my first trip to Semporna, one of the most beautiful places I have ever seen in my life.

As the tourism industry in Borneo continues to grow and evolve post-pandemic, introducing top-notch tourism education in this part of the world presents opportunities to enhance the learning experience and gain valuable insights into the industry.

Interestingly, Borneo's breathtaking islands and mysterious mountains, along with its rich history and fascinating culture, make it an excellent destination for adventurous summer schools.

Education will be a key to achieving sustainable development in Borneo. By effectively leveraging its comparative advantages, Borneo may establish connections with leading universities and research institutions, improving locals' access to quality education and attracting talent from across the region and the world.

The influx of students and researchers can bring new life to the cities with

ingredients for innovation and entrepreneurship. By creating space for education and research, more ideas may be turned into successful startups and businesses. Economic growth and development may naturally follow.

Partnering with international universities and research institutions will be key to establishing Borneo's standing as an education hub.

Taking advantage of its unique natural and cultural advantages, Borneo may establish strategic partnerships with universities in the Asean region, offering students the unique opportunity to explore and experience different environments and cultures.

This may start with hosting educational events, introducing student exchange programmes, developing joint research projects, and forging collaboration on academic programmes and courses.

And this should work both ways – it is not only about attracting others over but also exporting Borneo's culture, including intangible heritage like arts and values, to the rest

of the world.

Partnerships with Borneo also allow universities in the region to enhance the visibility and attractiveness to students and researchers, creating a more dynamic and competitive educational landscape in the region. Chances to study in multiple cities, such as Kuching and Kuala Lumpur, carry important implications not only to expand students' knowledge base but also to broaden their perspectives on the region.

In the long run, interdisciplinary programmes incorporating Borneo's strengths may be introduced to enhance research output, creating new opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing. Such initiatives may potentially lead to the development of solutions to both local and global challenges like climate change and food security.

All these may help improve Borneo's educational offerings and research capabilities, building a reputation as an education hub and making it more competitive in the region. Establishing a regional

education hub can boost the confidence of Borneo, which has historically been regarded as a marginal territory. It fundamentally contributes to identity construction and promotes a sense of belonging, allowing Borneo to establish itself as a major player in the region.

The key is diversity and inclusiveness, the fundamental strength of Borneo. Education has always been an effective platform to forge relationships – many people from the peninsula who studied in Sabah and Sarawak, including many of my friends and relatives, carry a life-long bond with Borneo.

Hopefully, through education, Borneo could play a leading role in advancing these values beyond the island boundaries and contribute to fostering a thriving, colourful and multicultural society in the region.

Dr Goh Chun Sheng is a researcher at Sunway University and Harward University. He is interested in exploring sustainable development in Borneo.

Broadband Unity Package helps bridge digital divide among Malaysians

KUALA LUMPUR: The Broadband Unity Package introduced by the Ministry of Communications and Digital can help bridge the digital divide among Malaysians, said Malaysian Press Institute (MPI) chief executive officer Datuk Dr Chamil Wariya.

He said it was a good initiative and would be a more effective one if the package was not limited to the B40 group, veterans, people with disabilities (PwDs) and senior citizens only, but also for the M40.

The package, he said, was also needed by the M40 because it will help reduce their cost of living when using Internet facilities, which is also a much-needed utility.

"The Broadband Unity Package needs to be open to all because broadband costs are still high compared to other countries in the region," he told Bernama.

On the package contract criteria, Chamil said the two-year or 24-month contract to be offered to them should be introduced in a more flexible



Datuk Dr Chamil Wariya



Ong Ching Seong

is National Tech Association of Malaysia (Pikom) chairman Ong Chin Seong who said that various studies had shown that the average internet cost in Malaysia was still high than some of its regional peers.

"The sweet spot for entry-level internet connectivity at RM50 would be a boon for most Malaysians," said Ong.

Meanwhile, a senior lecturer at the School of Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia Dr Azmil Mohd Tayeb said RM50 per month is a good round number and would be fairer for the targeted groups as times are hard these days.

He said the disadvantaged

said Azmil. Meanwhile, Malaysian Association for the Blind, chief executive officer Datuk George Thomas said the package is a great initiative to lure users who need to be economically viable as the current way of life for livelihood and knowledge.

"This is the way forward – leaving no one out," he added.

Earlier, Minister of Communications and Digital Fahmi Fadzil announced the package which is targeted for the B40, veterans, Persons with disabilities (PwD) as well as senior citizens group.

Experts lauded it as a worthy programme, and a pivotal

BYDPA opens for application

PUTRAJAYA: Applications for the Yang di-Pertuan Agong 2023 Scholarship (BYDPA) are now open to qualified Malaysians to pursue Master's and Doctorate degrees in the fields of Science and Technology, Economics, Law and Islamic Finance at local and foreign universities.

The Public Service Department (PSD) said application forms are available online at <http://esilav2.jpa.gov.my> until March 3.

The completed form together with the relevant supporting documents should be submitted and received by the PSD before

or on March 10, either by hand or by post, it said in a statement.

"Only applications that meet the requirements and pass further PSD screening will be shortlisted for interview.

It also said BYDPA applicants must be Malaysian citizens, aged 35 and below, as of Jan 1, 2023.

Applicants must have obtained excellent academic results, with a Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of 3.75 or first class or equivalent in their Degree or Master's level that was recognised by the government. Another condition is that

applicants have obtained a place at a local research university or at the world's leading research universities approved by the PSD.

It also said that priority will be given to candidates who are active in co-curriculum or community activities.

More information on the BYDPA programme can also be obtained by browsing <http://esilav2.jpa.gov.my> or calling 03-8885 3053/3571 on weekdays from 9am to 5pm or emailing penawarandp@jpa.gov.my. — Bernama

Free studies sponsorship programme able to change destiny of poor families — Experts

KUALA LUMPUR: The free studies sponsorship programme for first-generation students from poor families who are able to pursue studies at institutions of higher learning, as suggested by Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaleed Nordin, is seen as being able to change the fate of this group.

certainly have a great impact not only on this group but also in bridging the poverty gap in this country," he said when contacted by Bernama.

He said that in implementing this policy, the government must ensure the definition of the poor who needs to be sponsored, as there are different forms and categories of poverty

poor and the B40 can be fully realised.

He said that the programme will provide access to education and knowledge to the students involved in order to bring them and their families out of the cocoon of poverty.

"This programme will especially help poor families and B40 to get the same educational

form and the subscribers are given the facility to terminate the contract if they cannot afford it.

He said subscribers may be able to afford it at first, but may have problems and cannot afford it later.

As such, subscribers should be given the privilege and freedom to terminate the contract without incurring any penalty, he added.

Chamil also suggested that the price of the package be lowered to RM50 per month compared to the current rate of RM69.

Sharing Chamil's opinion to bring down the package price to the affordable range

groups would be the ones feeling the pinch, adding that the government should complement the cheaper broadband rate with some form of targeted subsidy, for instance, B40 families with school-aged children.

"The government can roll out with RM69 for now and gauge the response of target groups. If the response is tepid then it can lower the rate to RM50 or complement the initial rate with a targeted subsidy.

"Government and service providers also need to ramp up efforts to develop and expand coverage in rural areas including Sabah and Sarawak, so more people can take advantage of this programme,"

programme and provide government effort in narrowing the digital divide between those who are equipped digitally and those who are not.

The package entails unlimited data quota with broadband speed of as much as 30 Mbps, at only RM69 per month and shall be offered beginning March with a 24-month subscription contract.

According to a statement from the ministry, the price of the package is 22 per cent cheaper than the current price of the package with the same specifications which is about RM89, of which subscribers can enjoy savings of RM480 throughout the contract period. — Bernama

Senior Lecturer at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Centre for Studies in Learner Diversity, Dr Anuar Ahmad said the success of such programmes was seen in the 1970s when the government successfully supported this group through various initiatives such as hostels, scholarships, and loans.

"In the 1970s, programmes like this were able to open up a lot of opportunities for children in this group.

"Many of them (who were helped) excelled in education and have changed their destiny, becoming professionals with better incomes.

"If this policy is successfully tabled and implemented, it will

in this country.

"There is a need for research on the part of the MoHE (Ministry of Higher Education) because we do not want the implementation of this policy to open up space for criticism.

"It is hoped that the ministry has clear guidelines on how to implement this sponsorship, and there must be a definition, framework, and explanation for those who are eligible in the selection process," he said.

Meanwhile, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia senior lecturer of the Faculty of Economics and Muallamat Dr Muhammad Iqmal Hisham Kamaruddin said that through the programme, human capital formation among the

opportunities as other groups in Malaysia," he said.

"Taking into account the country's financial situation, this programme can be implemented by providing at least free tuition for this group," he said.

However, this would depend on the total number of recipients and the financial impact on the government, he said.

He said the programme is a continuation of the earlier implementation of the Siswa Sulung Keluarga Malaysia Development Programme (Sulung), with both programmes having similar features and focusing on poor families, or B40. — Bernama

