

Stronger TVET, digital readiness needed to drive Sabah's growth, says Sungai Manila rep

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KOTA KINABALU (April 28): Greater emphasis on human capital development, digital readiness and targeted economic initiatives is essential to secure Sabah's long-term growth, said Sungai Manila assemblyman Hazem Mubarak Musa.

Debating the state government's policy speech in the State Legislative Assembly, Hazem said stronger efforts were needed to align education, industry requirements and socio-economic development.

He stressed that Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) must be strengthened as the backbone of Sabah's industrial growth.

"Education plays a crucial role in ensuring continuous development. An educated generation is an asset that will ensure Sabah's progress does not stagnate," he said.

Hazem urged the government to further develop the education hub in Sungai Manila, home to institutions such as Universiti Malaysia Sabah, MARA Junior Science College, a polytechnic and a vocational college.

With the rapid expansion of industrial zones such as Kota Kinabalu Industrial Park, he said Sabah must ensure its youth are equipped to fill high-skilled technical roles instead of being left behind in the state's industrial development.

"We cannot allow our youth to remain mere spectators or only take up lower-level positions in our own industrial development.

"We must ensure they are equipped to take on high-skilled roles," he said.

To achieve this, he called for a major overhaul of the TVET curriculum to better meet industry demands, including advanced training in industrial robotics, electric vehicle (EV) maintenance, drone technology and artificial intelligence (AI).

Hazem also proposed closer collaboration between TVET institutions and multinational investors through memorandums of understanding, including the provision of modern training equipment and conditional job guarantees for graduates.

On economic development, he highlighted the potential of reviving barter trade in Sandakan to stimulate growth and attract investors, while strengthening the role of the Sandakan Industrial Park.

He also raised concerns over persistent traffic congestion from Gum-Gum to Batu 32 and questioned why the Libaran Bypass Road, initiated in 2014 as an alternative route, remains unusable.

On digital transformation, Hazem said infrastructure upgrades alone were insufficient without improvements in governance and service delivery.

"Providing telecommunications towers and fibre optic networks is not enough if work culture and efficiency remain weak.

"We need a comprehensive technology adoption strategy and a structured digital governance framework," he said.

He stressed the need to avoid siloed systems across government agencies and instead adopt an integrated approach, including the use of big data to manage traffic, predict flood risks and speed up business approvals.

"This will reduce leakages, cut bureaucracy and strengthen investor confidence in Sabah's administrative transparency," he added.

Hazem also highlighted the importance of bridging the digital divide, particularly for students in rural and interior areas who lack access to stable internet and adequate facilities.

"How can these students compete in STEM subjects at the national level when their schools lack even basic infrastructure?" he asked.

He proposed the establishment of Youth Innovation Hubs or makerspaces in every rural district, equipped with high-speed internet, computers, 3D printers and coding modules to nurture talent among rural youth.

"These centres should serve as free community spaces for students to explore technology and unlock their potential, regardless of geographical limitations," he said.

Hazem also called for greater attention to youth mental health in the digital era, noting the pressures posed by rapid technological change, social media and a competitive economic environment.

He suggested strengthening counselling services and developing government-supported telecounselling platforms to assist young people dealing with stress, anxiety and depression.

"Human capital is not measured solely by academic qualifications or technical skills, but also by emotional resilience and strength of character," he said.