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Pupils turn traditional knowledge into award-winning innovations

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KANAU: SRK Don Bosco made an impressive debut at the Borneo Indigenous Knowledge Innovation Competition (PIKB) 2026, winning 13 medals with innovations that transformed traditional knowledge and readily available natural resources into modern products.

The school secured three gold, two silver and eight bronze medals in the competition held at Dewan Sri Sulaman on Aug 22.

Headmistress Ivy Sapiun @ Patrick said 26 pupils and eight teacher-advisers were involved in developing the entries, which drew heavily on natural resources and traditional knowledge within the local community.

Among the innovations were products made from gembirang leaves, lemongrass and losun herbs, as well as compost fertiliser, betel leaf soap, foot-soak sachets, tawawo herbal bath sachets, rosemary oil and plant-based batik dyes.

Other entries included decorative lamps made from fuzzy pipe cleaners and stone-based bracelets.

Ivy said one of the school's strengths was its herb garden, where plants such as stevia, citronella, rosemary and gembirang are cultivated and readily available for pupils to use in their projects.

Traditional knowledge from the surrounding community was then combined with the pupils' creativity, processing techniques and modern approaches to product design and packaging.

One example was the gembirang leaf innovation.

Ivy said the plant had traditionally been used by local communities to help relieve itchy skin.

Building on this knowledge, the pupils developed gembirang into herbal soap and lotion, adapting a traditional practice into more practical modern personal-care products.

She said the development process began with pupils identifying problems in their surroundings before looking for locally available natural resources that could potentially provide solutions.

They then researched the properties and uses of the materials through references and knowledge passed down within the community.

Prototypes were subsequently produced and tested, with formulas, packaging and labelling improved where necessary.

Teachers guided the pupils in research,

product refinement, documentation and presentation preparation, while the pupils took on the roles of idea generators, researchers and product developers.

Teachers and pupils also documented each innovation's objectives, methods, impact and market potential, while the pupils were trained to present their projects and respond to questions from judges.

"The approach makes the competition more than just a contest to produce products, but a learning process based on problem-solving, creativity, STEM and entrepreneurship," Ivy said.

She described the 13-medal achievement as a meaningful starting point for the school and proof that primary school pupils were capable of developing innovations with value for the community, environment and education.

Ivy said the experience also helped cultivate an innovation culture at SRK Don Bosco, with pupils learning not only how to produce safe products but also how to identify problems, conduct research, work as a team, communicate and defend their ideas before a panel of judges.

The school plans to further develop and refine the innovations while strengthening their documentation to make them more competitive.

Ivy said the school hoped this would provide pupils with opportunities to compete at higher levels while raising public awareness of safer and environmentally friendly products derived from natural materials.

PIKB 2026 is an initiative aimed at encouraging the documentation, preservation and innovation of Borneo's traditional knowledge and practices, including food, herbs, arts, customs and philosophies of life.

It seeks to harness this heritage for community and local economic development while ensuring it is not lost over time.

The competition covers three categories – traditional food and health, community safety and prosperity, and arts, crafts and traditional musical instruments.

Entries are assessed based on originality, effectiveness and impact, including their potential to benefit the community, State and country.

The Tuaran leg, designated Zone 5 of the competition, formed part of the Borneo Festival of Ideas and was organised by Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) and the Institute for Development Studies (Sabah).



SRK Don Bosco pupils and teachers with their award-winning innovations.



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SUMMARIES

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