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Tawau best place to watch solar eclipse next year

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TAWAU: Tawau will be a strategic place in Malaysia to observe a partial solar eclipse phenomenon next year, which will reach up to 50 per cent at the location.

National Planetarium Director Anita Bahari said according to astronomical calculations, the date of the phenomenon was April 20, which fell during the fasting month.

"Tawau is the best location to observe a solar eclipse at the time compared to other places such as Peninsular Malaysia, where the sun will only be 5 to 15 per cent blocked," she said when addressing the closing ceremony of the Sabah east coast astronomical tour officiated by Sabah Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Yakub Khan, here, Wednesday.

Anita also sought approval from the Tawau Municipal Council as well as the Sabah Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (KSTI) for the National Planetarium to hold an observation programme with the Tawau community on the date.

She said the National Planetarium was prepared to bring equipment such as special telescopes as well as its team of astronomical experts who would explain the phenomenon and its impact on daily life to the public.

In the meantime, Anita welcomed the participation of non-governmental organisations, tourism players and the Sabah Government through KSTI to promote astronomical tourism.

"We will also identify locations in Sabah that can be gazetted as astronomical tourism areas," she added.

Meanwhile, Yakub said KSTI welcomed the National Planetarium's intention to hold a partial solar eclipse observation programme in Tawau next year.

On the Astronomy Tour, he said the programme attracted 14,000 people to attend the three tour locations held in Sandakan, Lahad Datu and Tawau and this proved that astronomy was able to pique the curiosity of Sabahans.

"The programme is the third collaboration between KSTI and the National Planetarium after the Sabah Science Carnival 2021 and a short video competition," he said.

According to him, the astronomy tour programme is also part of the Government's effort to increasing the number of students in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (Stem) in Sabah.