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### Three-pronged strategy to improve lot of residents

KUALA Linggi has been earmarked for many development projects over the next few years which would contribute immensely to the livelihood of the people living there.

Among them are a permanent campus for Kolej Islam Melaka in Kuala Sungai Baru; a regional fishing centre at the mouth of Kuala Linggi; a coastal highway spanning from Banting, Selangor to Gelang Patah, Johor; and, artificial islands in the Straits of Malacca.

Kuala Linggi could also be the site for a "dream" bridge between Malacca and Sumatra in Indonesia.

Interest in the latter had been relayed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to his Indonesian counterpart, President Suharto, recently. The idea was first brought up last year by the late Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Zin Abdul Ghani with Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas who agreed to it in principle.

Kuala Linggi, at 29 kilometres, is the closest point between Peninsular Malaysia and Indonesia. With Indonesia proposing to build a bridge from Sumatra to Pulau Rupert in the east, the bridge from the Malaysian side need only be built up to Pulau Rupert.

Bearing this in mind, it's little wonder why Datuk Ibrahim Durum, the second-term State Assemblyman for Kuala Linggi, is lobbying for his constituency to be the site of the bridge. He claimed that a survey of the ocean floor between the two countries showed that the sea at the Kuala Linggi point was relatively shallow and thus suitable for constructing a bridge.

"With the proposed coastal highway passing through areas in Kuala Linggi, the bridge would certainly complement the development and expand its tourism potential.

"Furthermore, the late Mohd Zin had announced that the State Government was willing to allocate a 80-hectare site for the bridge and a Government complex housing the immigration and customs offices to oversee the movement of people and goods," he said.

Stressing that the people must seize the opportunities that development brings, Ibrahim said:

"The people of Kuala Linggi are still lagging behind economically. My task would be towards changing their mindset to seize the opportunities at hand in order to improve themselves," he said.

He said most of his constituents are involved in fishing and agriculture-related activities.

Ibrahim talks of forming some form of consortium to ensure the spillovers from mega projects would benefit the people. "This, the people must do by themselves as I would only be able to assist them by giving advice," he said.

Apart from mega projects, Ibrahim speaks of a three-pronged strategy to bring development to the area. These are promoting tourism-related activities as well as capitalising on Kuala Linggi's white sandy beaches and rich mangrove swamps; wooing small and medium sized industries to set up at its 380-hectare industrial zone; and, modernising the agricultural sector.

"With regards the SMIs, 300 hectares are being developed by the State Development Corporation while the remaining 80 hectares will be developed by the Malacca Foundation."

With a population of 20,000, Kuala Linggi is the most populated constituency in Alor Gajah. It also has the highest number of hardcore poor: some 39 families. Of this, there are 20 elderly single mothers who are without proper jobs.

"These people would continue to need state assistance. State programmes like the recent distribution of Felcra shares should help their economic wellbeing."

According to Ibrahim, coastal erosion is another problem which plagues his constituency. He said about five kilometres of beach starting from Kuala Sungai Baru all the way down south to Kampung Tanjung Dahan have been affected. Already, millions have been spent by the Drainage and Irrigation Department on a wall to slow down the erosion, he added.

"However, this is just a short-term solution and a longer one would be to construct artificial islands like the Pulau Melaka to act as a barrier against the erosion.