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TANJONG MALIM (FOCUS)

TANJONG MALIM TO HAVE PROTON & MERCEDES-BENZ PLANTS

By: Arul Rajoo

TANJONG MALIM, Nov 25 (Bernama) -- From a small agriculture town known more for its "pau" or dumplings, Tanjong Malim is set to become a major hub for the automobile industry and education.

Two major car makers, national car maker Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Bhd (Proton) and Germany's Mercedes Benz, are to set up their plants here, a constituency which has 54,685 voters.

The ground-breaking ceremony for Proton's second plant to be located in Proton City near Behrang Ulu was officiated by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1997 but the economic slowdown forced the project to be deferred.

However, Tanjong Malim's incumbent member of parliament, Datuk Loke Yuen Yow, assured that the project would certainly take off when the current economic recovery reached a certain level.

"It (Proton City) will not be shifted elsewhere," said Loke, referring to the project which is expected to cost RM10 billion over 14 years. In the first phase, it is slated to produce 250,000 cars annually.

The Deputy Youth and Sports Minister, who has been the the MP since 1986, will face Keadilan's Wong Nam Yeong in the general election. In 1995, he won by a majority of 20,664 votes.

While the Proton City is located about 12km from the Perak-Selangor border, Bidor town in the north would probably house the Mercedes-Benz van production plant.

"This project is currently being discussed between the state government and the company concerned. It was planned much earlier but again the economic slowdown caused havoc," said Loke.

Under the Tanjong Malim Master Development Plan, one major industrial site and two major townships would be developed, he said.

Although the Proton City project had been deferred, a RM100 million four-lane road connecting Tanjong Malim and Behrang Ulu is currently under construction and is expected to be completed by the middle of next year.

Another major boost for the constituents is an almost completed hospital costing RM166 million in Slim River.

"This hospital will have specialists and it will cover not only the Tanjong Malim constituency but up to Tapah and Kuala Kubu Bharu," Loke said.

He said while the first teaching college in the country had been upgraded to the University Pendidikan Sultan Idris, several other higher learning institutions were being planned for the district.

He said a polytechnic was coming up in Sungai Behrang while the Survey and Mapping Department Institute (Jabatan Ukur and Pemetaan) would take shape in Diamond Creeks, a resort near Proton City.

Loke said a bridge over the railway crossing in Tanjong Malim had been approved and the site was already identified.

"With all this, Tanjong Malim is going to be a new industrial and education zone. This will spur economic growth and generate employment," he said.

Various developments taking shape had certainly raised BN's chances of winning the seat that had always been considered a safe haven for the ruling coalition.

"Things look good but we cannot be complacent. We are working hard and response from the Chinese and Indian voters are very good but the Malays

are split a little," he said.

Loke said PAS had been working hard in the Malay areas for the past six months by exploiting national issues and BN was making house-to-house calls to explain to the people the actual situation.

"There is a English saying...a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. We are not perfect but BN has proven its ability to serve the people," he said. -- BERNAMA

AR SHY