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Kedah-Plan

KEDAH MAPS OUT ROAD TO HIGHER DEVELOPMENT

A Special Report

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KUALA LUMPUR: Just like most other states in the country, the rice bowl state of Kedah also aspires to achieve a developed status by 2010 or 10 years ahead of Vision 2020 when the whole country is expected to become a developed nation.

For this purpose, the Kedah government has crafted the Development Action Plan 2010 which will foster industrial development to spur economic growth.

The plan was launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on June 20, in conjunction with the 56th Umno General Assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) here.

The strategies contained in the plan were drawn up in line with the policies laid down in the Third Long-term Perspective Plan and the Eighth Malaysia Plan.

Speaking at a recent media briefing here, Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain said the focus was also on the information and communication industry, tourism, agriculture, education, human resource development, infrastructure and entrepreneurial and social development.

As a poor state, Kedah should move fast in tandem with the increasing challenges of globalisation and tough competition in getting new markets and investment.

With this in mind, aggressive measures would be undertaken to attract foreign and local investment at the rate of RM1 billion per year, he said.

INDUSTRIAL SECTOR GROWTH

Syed Razak said sustained industrial sector growth was an important element which would contribute to Kedah attaining a developed state status within this decade.

Among the economic growth generating ventures that would be developed are the RM10-billion Kota Perdana Development Project covering 3,470 hectares at Bukit Kayu Hitam encompassing the Asean Industrial and Free Trade Zone, cargo airport, commercial centres, housing estates, educational institutions and the customs and immigration complex.

A RM65.3-million allocation had also been approved to provide ancillary services to Phase Three of the Kulim High Technology Industrial Area covering some 400 hectares.

Other projects were the development of the Gurun Industrial Area at a cost of RM56 million and the Pokok Sena Industrial area involving RM58 million.

Several other projects were also in the process of implementation and these included the Kota Putra Project in Durian Burung, expansion of the Sultan Abdul Halim Airport in Alor Setar, construction of a port at Kuala Kedah and a coastal road.

In the area of tourism, Kedah would seek to exploit its scenic beauty, its unique natural environment, culture and arts to attract both domestic and foreign tourists.

"Kedah has its inherent strength compared to some other states in Malaysia as it has good road and rail communications," said Syed Razak.

MAIN GATEWAY

Kedah is also one of the main gateways for tourists from countries of

the north visiting Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore.

By 2010 some 4.9 million tourists are projected to visit Kedah based on a growth rate of 12 percent per year in tourist arrivals.

To welcome the increasing number of tourists to Kedah, steps were being taken to increase the number of hotels and other types of accommodation and also to improve existing facilities. At present there are 8,059 hotel rooms available in the whole of Kedah.

Kedah at this point is viewed as one of the less successful states in attracting tourists because of the lack of comfortable accommodation facilities as observed by the Editor-in-Chief of Utusan Malaysia Datuk Khalid Mohamad at the end of Syed Razak's media briefing.

Khalid had said that all of Kedah's noble efforts were indeed praiseworthy but he was disappointed that hotel facilities in Kedah had not changed much over the last 30 years.

Syed Razak said Kedah would also draw on its rich history to attract tourists to the state. The history of its sultanate dates back to 634 AD based on historical artifacts found in the Bujang Valley, Kota Sungai Mas, Kuala Muda and Alor Setar.

Kedah is also the first territory in this region to receive Islam in the year 1136.

TOURISM ASSETS

Kedah's most valuable tourist asset is the world class tourist resort of Langkawi.

To retain its attractiveness, various tourism products would be showcased such as its cultural activities and duty-free shopping.

Syed Razak also stressed that in its eagerness to develop the tourism and industrial sectors, the Kedah Government would not neglect the agricultural sector which was the main basis of the state's economic growth.

At present Kedah supplies about 40 percent of the country's rice needs. Padi covers 144,928 hectares of Kedah's land surface including 80,238 hectares in the Muda Agricultural Development Area (MADA), 15,684 hectares in the Drainage and Irrigation Department (DID) scheme area, and 16,176 hectares outside of the DID area. There are also 32,830 hectares of idle land.

He said efforts were being made to increase padi cultivation and harvest through the use of modern technology, mechanisation and large-scale management.

Steps had also been taken in the MADA area to set up mini padi estates and to merge small plots to facilitate large scale farming and reap the benefits of economies of scale.

The Kedah Government had also taken steps to revive the tiger prawn rearing project which became controversial earlier and was closed down.

PRAWN PRODUCTION

The project is capable of producing some 1,400 tonnes of tiger prawns by 2003. The harvest would increase with the opening of more ponds over a 1,000 hectare area in Kuala Muda.

At the same time, the Halal Food Hub in Paya Pahlawan had been revived and this would contribute to the growth of the halal fast food industry in the country.

The Government-private sector joint venture project to prepare and supply meat-based fast food would place the centre as the foremost supplier of meat in the country.

The fact that Syed Razak chose to launch the plan showed his determination to lead the state to greater progress than earlier envisaged,

and at the same time proved that the Barisan Nasional Government would fulfill its election pledges.

From the political aspect, the reopening of the Kerpan prawn project and the revival of the Halal Food Hub at Paya Pahlawan would no doubt resolve the earlier controversies over the project.

Syed Razak no doubt would be closely watched and monitored over the implementation of the ambitious plan. -- Bernama

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