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Kedah-Developed

KEDAH ON THE PATH TO A DEVELOPED STATE BY 2010

A Special Report by: Zahari Morad and Zulkefli Salleh

ALOR STAR: Kedah, considered one of the four poor states in Malaysia is

now on a solid path towards a fully developed state by 2010.

Under the master plan `Kedah Maju 2010' the state's economy is now

growing rapidly with an average Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of five percent for the last four years exceeding the national figures.

Considered an outstanding accomplishment for a state that previously

depended on agriculture as the core of its economy, the sterling performance silenced the critics who were sceptical on the development plan

to eradicate the "kampung" image often associated with the state.

Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain during an interview

recently told BERNAMA, Kedah Maju 2010 introduced under his tenure is not a

magic wand that would change Kedah overnight.

But for Kedah to achieve a developed state status at par with Selangor,

Johor and Penang, it all depends on the success in implementing the master

plan formulated by experts in various fields.

A GOLD MINE

The Kedah Maju 2010 master plan has outlined three areas considered

gold mines which can be explored to bring about maximum development, he

said.

The three "gold mines" -- industry, agriculture and tourism although

not new to Kedah, but due to lack of proper planning previously the outcome

was dismal. On industry, he said under the master plan the sector is being

rejuvenated to play a pivotal role in expanding Kedah's economy.

Among the pro-active steps taken to attract investments is sending out

missions to woo foreign investors, promote the state locally and provide

incentives with investments worth RM1 billion forecasted annually until

2010.

The latest success of the state government is winning over Naza Motors

which has set up an automotive assembly plant in Gurun that would assemble Kia vehicles from South Korea, with an investment of RM390 million.

HIGH TECH INDUSTRY

Also operating at the same location is the Petronas Fertilizer, a multi million ringgit fertilizer plant owned by national petroleum giant Petronas.

Syed Razak said Kedah has the upper hand as it has well established industrial areas like in Sungai Petani and Kulim Hi-Tech Park in Kulim, that one day could equal "Silicon Valley" of California, in United States.

At the north most part of the state, the Bukit Kayu Hitam industrial zone is the home of Asian Composite Manufacturing Sdn Bhd, a company that produces components for Boeing aircrafts.

Syed Razak said industrial zones would also be introduced in left out areas like Sik, Baling, Padang Terap and Pendang.

MAXIMISING AGRICULTURAL OUTPUT

The state being the rice bowl of the nation has bigger plans as the food hub of Malaysia with its agricultural output meeting its own needs and the nation's.

In line with this, he said, permanent plantation zones, fruit and vegetable farms, horticulture and new potential cash crops are being considered by the Agriculture Department.

Apart from that, aquaculture is being developed in Sungai Kedah. He stressed that the use of agricultural land would be maximised for various type of crops, in the short and the long term, including for commodity crops like padi and palm oil.

"The main objective of the master plan is to increase the farmers' income and the only mean to achieve this is by introducing commercial farming," he said.

Syed Razak said at the end of last year, the federal government approved RM284.4 million allocation to enable the cultivation of almost 30,000 hectares of padi outside MADA (Muda Agricultural Irrigation Scheme) that would benefit almost 27,000 farming families.

With the total padi areas under the jurisdiction of the agency covering

130,000 hectares, this would help enhance the farmer's earnings from RM200 a month previously, to between RM1,500 to RM2,000.

DIVERSIFYING TOURISM PRODUCTS

On tourism, he said the state government encourages the private sector to exploit and diversify tourism products encompassing the rich cultural and agricultural heritage of the state.

According to unofficial statistics, the number of tourist arrivals in Kedah last year was 2.1 million with 60 percent of them arriving in Langkawi.

Apart from these three main sectors, education, social welfare, training, health, human development, youth and sports were also given emphasis in the master plan.

"I'm aware there are people who doubt the Kedah government's ability to achieve developed state status by 2010, considering Malaysia's target to achieve the status is by 2020," he said.

"The responsibility is on the state officials and for the people of the state this is a "wake-up call" for them. By targetting 2010, they have to work harder as there is some element of urgency here. For instance if we set Kedah Maju 2030, then the people will say there is still a long way to go and would adopt a lackadaisical attitude," he said.

A CHALLENGE FOR KEDAHANS

As Kedah is left out compared to other states, therefore its people need to work harder.

He said, most of the project under the master plan has already taken off. Among the project under implementation are Bandar Diraja Anak Bukit, Kota Perdana in Bukit Kayu Hitam, Bandar Baru Beris in Sik, the development of Kuala Kedah town, the Trans-Eastern road connecting Padang Terap, Sik and Baling.

"I'm proud that the people understand and support the government's aspiration and if all parties continue their support, the goal to uplift the living standards would be achieved," he said.

Quoting prime minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's

statement

"Work with me, not for me", Syed Razak said the state government and Kedahans need to work hand in hand in ensuring the success of Kedah Maju 2010.

Kedah a state that provided two Prime Ministers so far (the late Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra and Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad) is now gearing itself to be leader among the developed states by 2010.--BERNAMA

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