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Syed Mokhtar draws in RM1b investment (HL)

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BUSINESSMAN Tan Sri Syed Mokhtar Al-Bukhary has formed a RM1 billion company with a United Arab Emirates businessman to invest in Malaysia and the region.

Syed Mokhtar and Mohamed Ali Alabbar signed in late February a 50:50 investment company that will look for opportunities in utilities, aluminium extraction and processing, power generation, financing, real estate development as well as the fast-growing sectors in South-East Asia.

The signing ceremony was witnessed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, but the deal itself was only announced yesterday.

"It will also be able to attract foreign direct investments from across the globe, especially the West Asian region, where investors are looking for new and attractive avenues of capital growth," Syed Mokhtar said in a statement.

Syed Mokhtar is well-known for his role in developing Johor's Port of Tanjung Pelepas (PTP) by attracting the world's number one shipping line, Maersk Sealand of Denmark, to be a major shareholder of the port.

He was also instrumental in bringing Taiwan-owned Evergreen to PTP, further transforming the port as a massive threat to Singapore's dominant role as a regional hub.

Syed Mokhtar was also responsible for the proposed transformation of the Senai airport into a major logistics hub that will complement PTP.

He is said to be instrumental in a US\$2 billion (US\$1 = RM3.80) deal signed last September between Dubai Aluminium Co Ltd and GIIC Holdings Sdn Bhd to build an aluminium smelting plant in Sarawak.

BMW is another major foreign company that could also be associated with Syed Mokhtar, who has been in the business for the last 30 years.

It was reported early this year that BMW was in the final stage of discussions on the setting up of a distribution base at PTP.

Meanwhile, Alabbar said his party was banking on the attractive investment opportunities in South-East Asia and "Syed Mokhtar's expertise and resources" to help strengthen investor faith in Malaysia and in the region.

"Investors looking for options now have an opportunity to once again experience real growth. After analysing the global economic trends, we are confident that the time to invest in the Asean region is now."

Alabbar has lived and worked in South-East Asia for more than 10 years,

and has a successful growth record.

Euromoney magazine named him as one of the five prominent Arabs who were among the world's top 50 economic personalities, while Advertising Age selected him as one of the International Marketing Superstars.

Besides spearheading major public and private sector enterprises in West Asia, Alabbar is also the chairman of Royal Clicks Ltd listed in Singapore, which markets more than 75 fashion brands in over 30 countries in the Asia Pacific and West Asia.

Syed Mokhtar elaborated on the new company, saying that it will be a conglomerate investing in companies in the core sectors of the economy that offer capital growth.

"It will seek to generate continual shareholder value, initially through investments in the core sectors and later through the identification and pursuit of new areas of growth."