

Johor's U-turn on no-passport rule for S'poreans
Malaysiakini.com
April 5, 2007

Johor's chief minister Abdul Ghani Othman announced that plans floated last November to allow visitors from Singapore to enter Johor without passports had been dropped.

However, he did not elaborate on why for the sudden about-turn to the policy. Last week, former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad lashed out at the new policy at an Umno function in the southern state.

Abdul Ghani also tried to reassure the country's majority ethnic Malays on another contentious issue - that they will not be sidelined by a relaxation of pro-bumiputera policies in the area.

In a bid to draw foreign investment to the Johor region, the government last month relaxed the policies, including those which say Malays and indigenous groups must hold at least 30 percent equity in any firm.

Abdul Ghani emphasised the relaxation was only for companies in designated zones and sectors in the Iskandar Development Region (IDR), which neighbours Singapore.

"The issue of locals being swamped by foreigners or becoming outsiders in their own country does not arise," Abdul Ghani was quoted as saying by the state Bernama news agency.

"There is also no question of Johor Malays being forced to the fringes with the influx of foreigners, particularly Singaporeans," he added.

"This is because the IDR will be a boon rather than a bane to the people of Johor."

Risk backlash

Malaysia wants to transform the IDR into a shining commercial hub to rival cities such as Hong Kong, and has been aggressively seeking foreign funds amidst growing regional competition for investment.

Analysts say Malaysia relaxed the policies to draw investors, but that the government is at risk of a backlash over the politically-sensitive exemptions.

Since the 1970s, Malaysia has retained affirmative action policies for Malays and indigenous groups in order to close a wealth gap with the minority Chinese community.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/65563>