

Bridge a catalyst for growth

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NIBONG TEBAL: The RM3bil second Penang Bridge will serve as a catalyst for development at the northern corridor and also position the state as a northern hub for sea and air connections.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the Penang International Airport and the Penang Port would be upgraded to support the second Penang Bridge as a gateway to the northern corridor so as to enhance and promote the economic growth of the neighbouring states.

"With the second bridge, activities at the Penang International Airport in Bayan Lepas and the Penang Port will increase manifold in terms of export and import business," said Abdullah at the groundbreaking ceremony of the second bridge in Batu Kawan yesterday.

There is no need to build more airports or ports. We will use what is already there, but it (current infrastructures) should be upgraded," he said.

"Once the airport is upgraded, I believe it will have the ability and capacity to bring air cargo from the northern region to other places. And this can also be used to import goods to cater for the needs of the northern region."

"The port when upgraded will also help boost imports and exports of goods in the northern region," he said.

Abdullah said compared to the Klang Valley and Kinta Valley, the development of the northern region had not been aggressive.

"This may be because of the importance placed on the agriculture sector. But now, we want this area to be developed

because there are many agro-based SMEs (small and medium scale enterprises) based here."

Abdullah added that the tourism industry here would also benefit from better infrastructure.

On another matter, Abdullah assured the people that the state's ferry services would not be terminated.

He said a special allocation would be provided to upgrade the ferry services operated by Penang Port Sdn Bhd.

"I feel that the ferry is synonymous with Penang and is one of its main tourist attractions," he said to reporters after the ground breaking ceremony.

Abdullah also said there must be no delays by the

Penang Government in approving materials for building the bridge.

"If there are delays, we would lose a lot of money and incur more costs. The bridge must be completed in the allocated time and done properly," he said.

On another matter, Abdullah hopes delegates to the 57th Umno General Assembly will focus their debates and discussions on the 9th Malaysia Plan (9MP) since it is the first of the three stages to achieving Vision 2020.

Speaking later at the Permatang Pauh Umno's open house held at the Seberang Jaya Expo site, Abdullah said the construction of the second bridge linking Batu Kawan on

the mainland and Batu Maung on the island would generate over 2,000 job opportunities as well as provide sub-contract work for 200 local contractors.

Abdullah said the northern corridor was chosen for development because it had large tracts of land for agro-based and agriculture activities.

"There are also land near Permatang Pauh suitable for the biotechnology invest.

"I have asked Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon to bring biotechnology investments quickly into the area," he said.

Abdullah said some 31,000 contracts had been given to small contractors in the class 'F' category following the implementation of the 9MP in June.