

# Abdullah's baby, a super corridor in south Johor

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JOHOR BARU: The Prime Minister armed here in a take-charge mood yesterday and made the biggest announcement the country has heard from him this year since the Ninth Malaysia Plan: Johor is the new growth engine for Malaysia. It will create a million new jobs over the next two decades.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi nicked the southern State to lead the way the first of four newpawer corridors in the country, including Sabah and Sarawak

They are aimed at magnetising billions of ringgit of global investment to sprout jobs and growth for the nation

To kickstart this new engine, he said foreigners were ready to invest RM15 billion in the new initiative, dubbed the South Johor Corridor (SJC). It will be a priority development by the Federal Government under the Ninth Malaysia Plan.

His announcement, made in an off-the-cuff speech at Senai Airport to a crushing crowd of 5,000 supporters, was greeted with thunderous applause.

"This is for the people of Johor. Let them hear it first from me. I want Johor to develop and prosper just like in the old days under rulers like Sultan Abu Bakar, who is the founder of modern Johor," declared Abdullah.

He said when fully developed, the super corridor could surpass the Klang Valley as the nation's number one growth destination, and even give neighbouring Singapore a run for its money.

The Prime Minister will take personal charge of the project as the joint-chief of a new body expected to be created specially by Parliament, called the South Johor Authority. The other chairman of the authority will be Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman.

The proposed authority is aimed at giving focus and direction to the separate plans of private investors which, sources told the *New Straits Times*, involve billions of dollars to be pumped into prime land stretching over 10,000 hectares, more than twice the size of Singapore.

Sources also told the NST that Middle East investors were poised, together with Malaysian companies and private investors, to

invest billions of US dollars in a wide range of breakthrough projects.

These include an education hub with state-of-the-art facilities supported by world-class brand name universities. Also on the yards is a medical centre of excellence, with top-end private hospitals and research facilities.

Tourism, already a big earner for Johor, is to get a bigger push with higher-end hotels to draw big-spending visitors.

In pushing for faster growth in Johor, Abdullah, who is also the Finance Minister, said the new super corridor would be developed the same way as Hong Kong and Shenzhen in

China were, to emerge as special economic zones and the focus of investors.

The SJC's sprawling physical presence will stretch from the Causeway to Gelang Patah, embracing Senai Airport and Johor - two biggest ports.

Abdullah is confident the SJC can compete for business and investments from around the world with its strategic location and built-in advantages.

"Let me stress that this is my idea. It did not come from anyone else. It is my own vision and plan to create this super corridor in south Johor to make it the nation's premier growth centre," he said.

