

Penang on fast track to lead Northern Corridor

NST- 1/8/2007.

■ **By Lee Keng Fatt, Marina Emmanuel and Audrey Dermawan**
news@nst.com.my

BUTTERWORTH: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday declared Penang as the logistics and transportation hub for the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER).

The prime minister said several major projects would be carried out, including the expansion of Penang Port and the Penang International Airport as well as the RM2 billion integrated terminal for rail, road and sea travel known as "Penang Sentral".

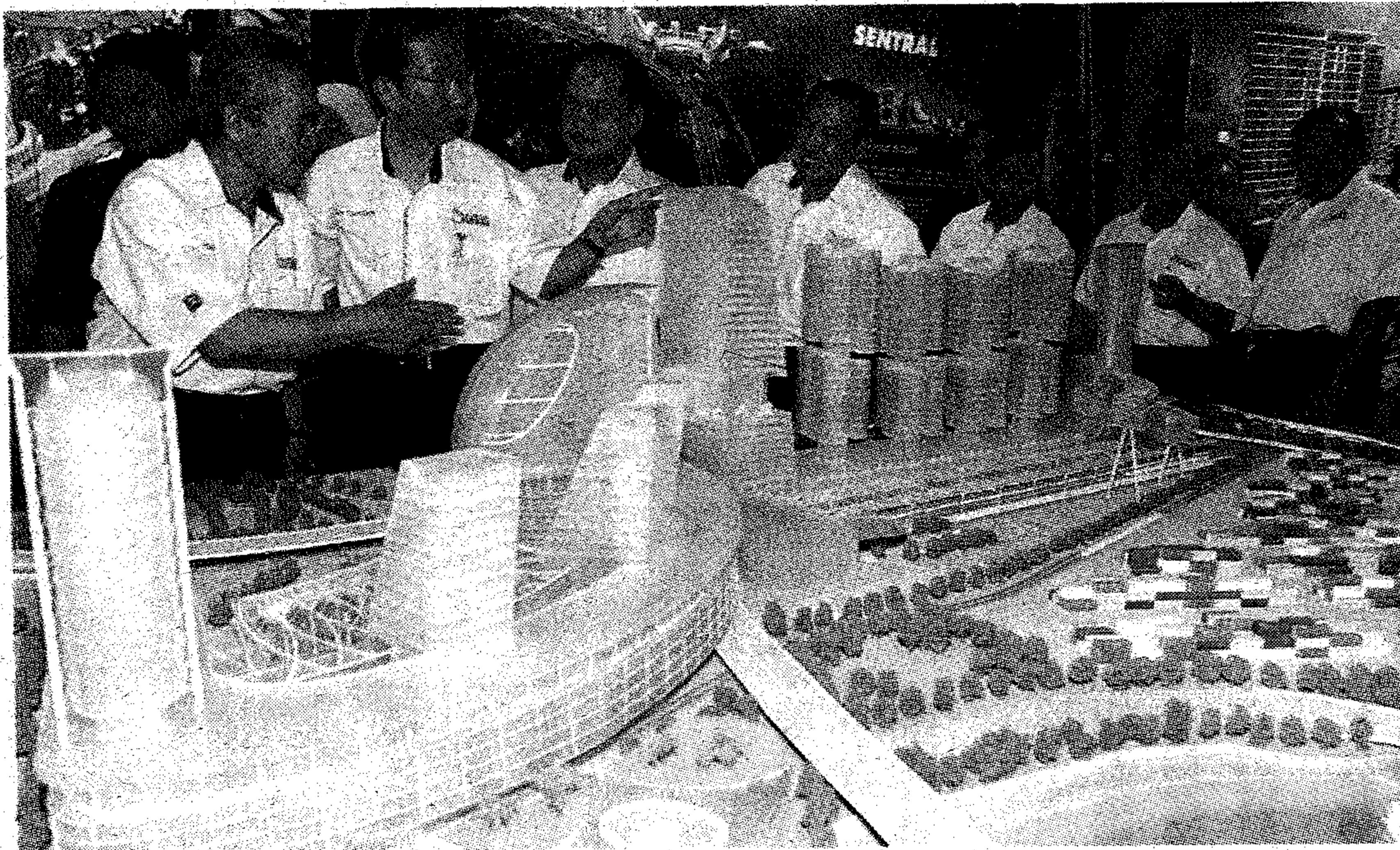
Although the state already possesses good logistics, such as ready access to the North-South Expressway, the Penang Bridge, a deep-water port and an international airport, Abdullah said the various projects were necessary in anticipation of an increase in economic activities within the NCER.

"With the many projects taking shape, Penang will serve as the gateway to the Northern Corridor.

"Also, with the increase in sophisticated logistics capabilities, the state will strengthen its position as the best logistics and transportation hub for the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT)," he said after the launching ceremony of the NCER's Penang package here.

Present were Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon and Menteri Besar of Perlis Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim, his counterparts from Kedah, Datuk Seri Mahdzir Khalid and Perak, Datuk Seri Mohd Tajol Rosli.

Also present were cabinet ministers, Sime Darby chairman Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid and



Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (left) and Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon (second from left) looking at a model of Penang's development under the Northern Corridor Economic Region in Butterworth yesterday.

group chief executive officer Datuk Seri Ahmad Zubir Murshid.

More than 10,000 people attended the ceremony held at the Seberang Prai Municipal Council community hall in Jalan Bagan Luar, which Abdullah later renamed Dewan Datuk Haji Ahmad Badawi, after his late father.

He also officiated the groundbreaking ceremony for Penang Sentral and flagged off the much-awaited inaugural RapidPenang public bus service.

RapidPenang is a subsidiary of RapidKL and a government-owned company under the Ministry of Finance Incorporated.

Abdullah said the state would also introduce rapid ferry services

next year and the 37-km light monorail transit system.

"The state's role is of utmost importance in determining the success of the whole NCER initiative."

Abdullah also announced the setting up of the micro-electronics excellence centre to further boost the manufacturing sector.

He said the centre would be a partnership between the government and private sector.

"The centre will be used to develop the local workforce to enable it to take on high-tech value-added activities," he said, adding that multinational corporations (MNCs) would be roped in to help in research and development efforts.

Abdullah also touched on the

need for the state to promote itself as a premier tourist destination as well as a place for meeting, incentive, convention and exhibition (MICE) activities.

He said the existing Penang Turf Club in Batu Gantong would be developed into the Penang Global City Centre (PGCC), similar to the Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC).

Also, Pulau Jerejak will be developed for medical tourism.

Abdullah said the participation of the private sector would accelerate growth in the NCER.

He said Khazanah Nasional Bhd had opened an office in the state to attract more investments from government-linked companies and corporations.