

COMPACT BUT COMPREHENSIVE

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KUALA LUMPUR: For something that will affect the lives of the 4.29 million people living in Perlis, Kedah, Penang and north Perak, the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER) blueprint — at just over 140 pages — is quite a slim document.

However, it is packed with recommendations and proposals that are not just far-reaching but also achievable in the near future.

At the NCER launch in Kedah and Perlis earlier yesterday, the prime minister set the wheels in motion, opening the Muda Agricultural Development Authority's (Mada) estate management programme in Kedah and the Seed Research and Development Centre in Perlis.

Large private corporations will be encouraged to invest in the region and immediate initiatives will be put in place to help the rural communities participate in the economy, for example, the cultivation of mango trees on padi field bunds, harvesting padi stalks for animal feed and planting corn on land that is lying idle.

Realising that this is an initiative that will spread out over the next 18 years, the master planners — Sime Darby Berhad — built in "quick wins" where results can be seen as early as the next three years as a way of creating a "demonstration effect".

The next step will be the establishment of an implementation organisation — the Northern Corridor Implementation Agency (NCIA) — plus the launch of a one-stop centre for investor support.

Focused development in selected zones and the launch of two to three high-impact projects in each economic or social focus area should follow. And, of course, physical infrastructure and human capital development have to be implemented as well.

The 18-year time frame is thus divided into three phases: Quick wins which will help solidify the foundation for sustainable, private sector-led growth; the broadening and deepening of private sector involvement; and achieving regional leadership through sustainable, market-led growth.

One of the first tasks of the NCIA will be to go into the rural heartland to identify the hardcore poor, relocate them to proper housing and help them with their immediate basic needs.

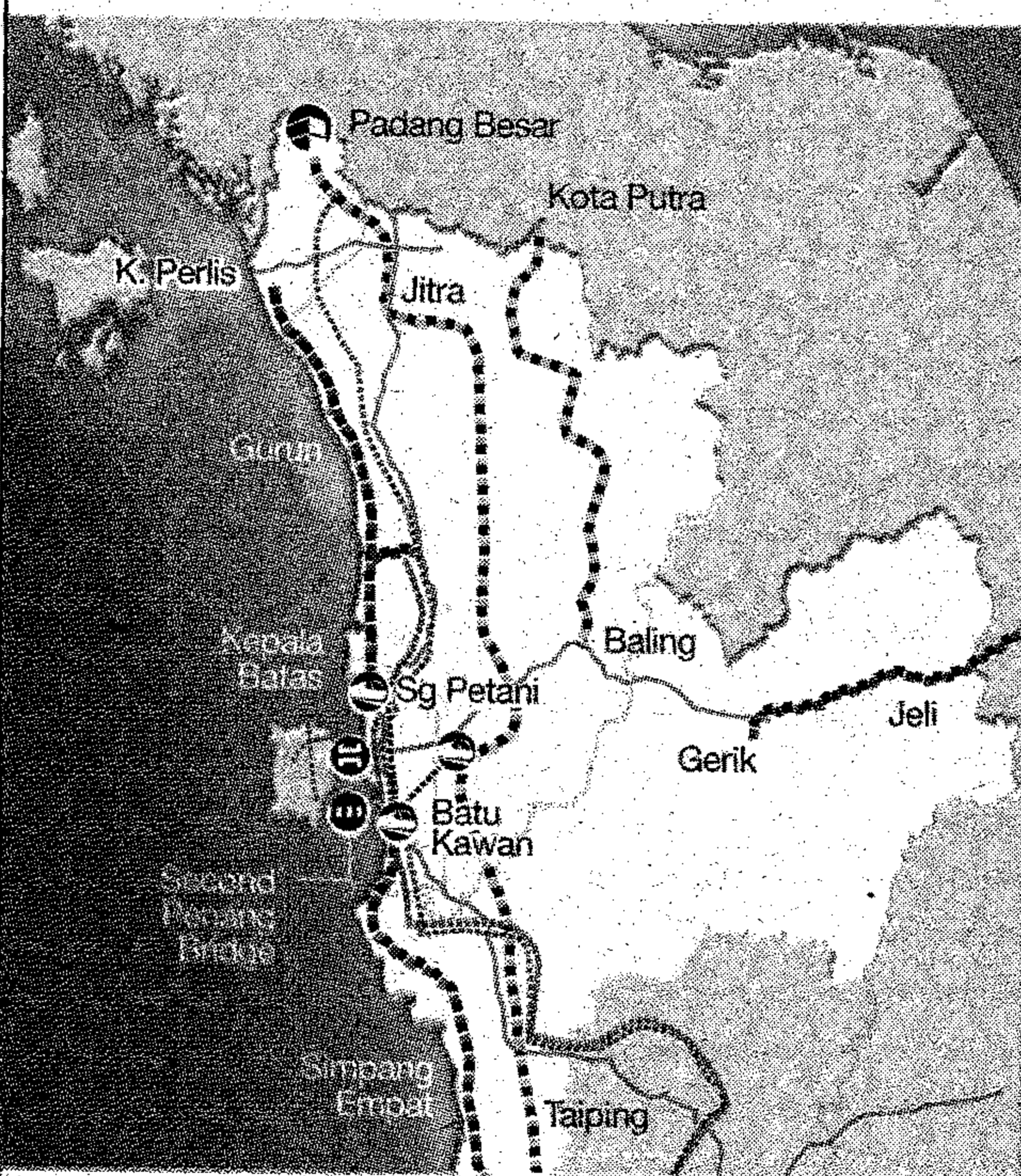
In addition, they will be given opportunities to work as contract farmers or contract workers in handicraft centres.

Small-scale rural entrepreneurs will be encouraged to partner with larger companies to ensure the viability and sustainability of their businesses.



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (second from left) being briefed on the Sime Darby Seeds Research and Development Centre by Sime Darby group chief executive Datuk Ahmad Zubir Murshid in Kangar yesterday. With them are the prime minister's wife Datin Seri Jeanne Abdullah, Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim and Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon.

IMPROVING TRANSPORT CONNECTIVITY IN NCER



- Existing:**
- North-South Expressway from Ipoh to Bukit Kayu Hitam
 - Penang Bridge
- Proposed/Planned projects:**
- Double Tracking
 - Fast Commuter Train
 - Monorail
 - Coastal Highway
 - Central Spine
 - Trans-Kedah Hinterland Highway (TEKIH)
 - Gerik-Jeli Link
 - Integrated Terminals
 - Inland Container Depot
 - Second Penang Bridge
- Logistics Upgrade**
- Butterworth-Kulim-Gerik-Jeli-Kota Baru
 - Alor Star-Kuala Nerang; and Kuala Nerang-Pedu
 - Taiping-Gerik
 - Penang Bridge

Herbs, horticulture and plans for a whole lot more

KUALA LUMPUR: The Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER) is set to transform the region into a modern food zone for Malaysia, thus improving the contribution of the agriculture sector to economic growth.

The NCER blueprint has classified 40 per cent, or 932,581 hectares, in the northern region (4.9 per cent in Penang, 6.6 per cent in Perlis, 27.8 per cent in Perak and 60.7 per cent in Kedah), for agriculture use. These include 100,000ha of idle land.

Of this, 595,615ha will be for the cultivation of padi, sugar cane, oil palm and rubber. The 167,598ha for padi will account for 64 per cent of the total padi cultivation areas in the peninsula.

One of the NCER blueprint's three key strategies for agriculture is increasing its contribution to the Northern Corridor's gross domestic product from the current 12 per cent to 15 per cent in 2012.

The second strategy is to increase exports of agricultural products with



Members of the public at the exhibition organised in conjunction with the launch of the Northern Corridor Economic Region in Alor Star yesterday.

the promotion of upstream and downstream activities to enable the NCER to export around RM48 billion worth of agricultural produce by 2012.

The third is to raise rural income through programmes that diversify sources of income from existing land and improve land productivity.

There are three strategic thrusts — promotion of commercial farming in partnership with local communities, crop specialisation and the introduction of world-class agricultural technology.

According to the blueprint, a phased approach will be adopted to achieve the objective of increased agricultural growth and improved rural income, starting with courting anchor investors (2007-2012), accelerating regional growth (2013-2020) and establishing global leadership (2021-2025).

Seven immediate implementation programmes have been identified — common management of land to achieve economies of sale; re-designation of unused industrial land for agriculture; strengthening of infrastructure; provision of funding and incentives; establishment of the Seeds Research & Development Centre; global branding; and strengthening of human capital.

These programmes will be complemented by specific sub-sector initiatives focusing, among others, on padi, aquaculture and livestock farming.

The productivity of the padi sector will be improved from the current three-five tonnes per hectare to around eight tonnes by 2012 and nine-10 tonnes by 2020. This will be possible following specific initiatives such as producing high-yielding seed germplasm for padi at the Seeds R&D Centre, expanding the number of certified farmers and gazetted core granaries to protect padi fields from being used for non-profit purposes.

Initiatives to promote fisheries and aquaculture include the setting up of a national hatchery centre in Kedah for the breeding of premium fish fry; encouraging the setting up of a deep-sea fishing industry with a fish processing plant in Kuala Perlis; and zoning selected coastal areas for the rearing of fish and shellfish in cages.

Using the National Feedlot Centre in Gemas as the "nucleus" and breeding source for young calves is among the specific initiatives to promote livestock farming, apart from creating halal processing centres in Sungai Petani, Tasik Gelugor and Padang Besar, specialising in processed meat products for export and converting under-utilised industrial estates into premium livestock parks.

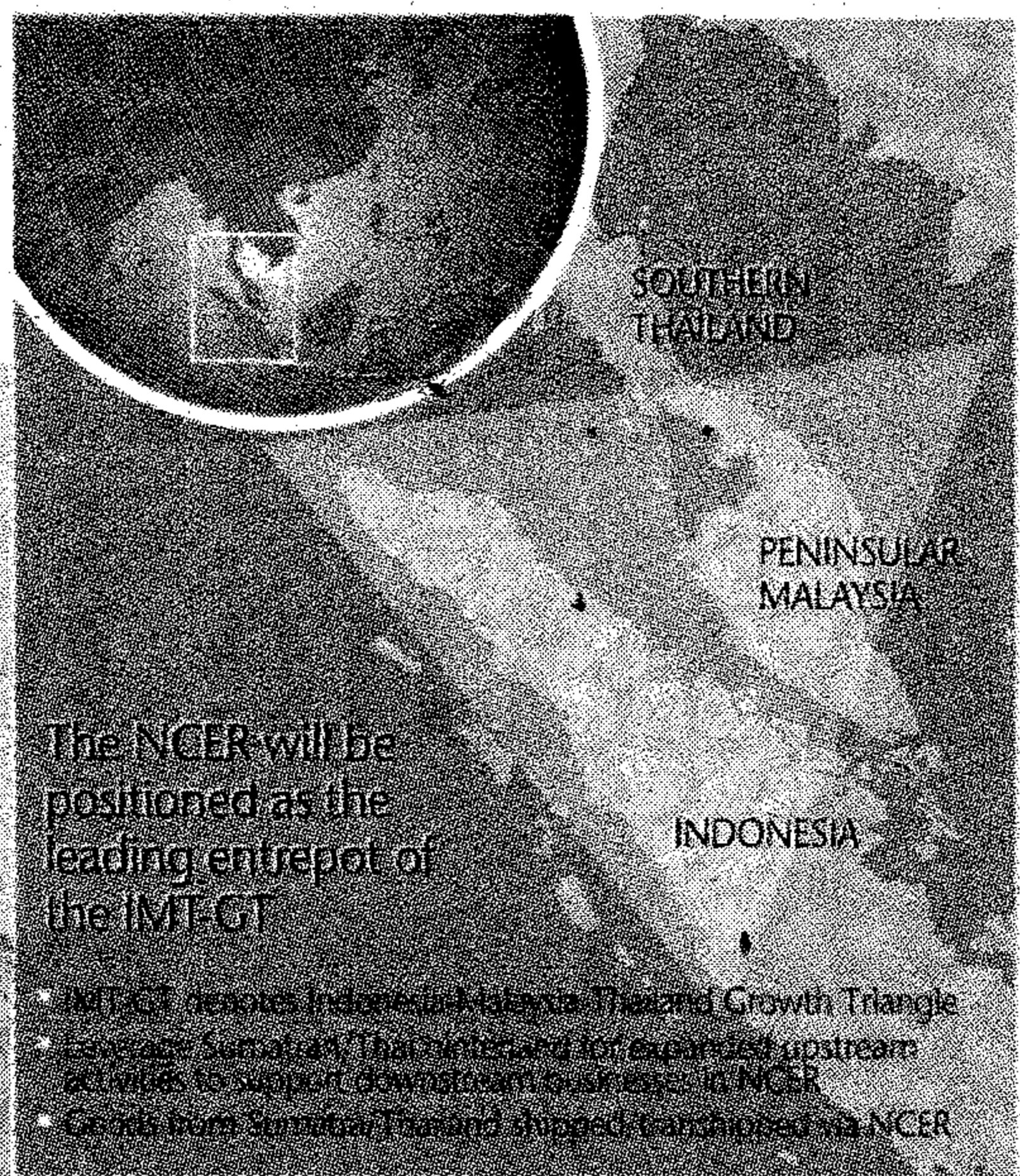
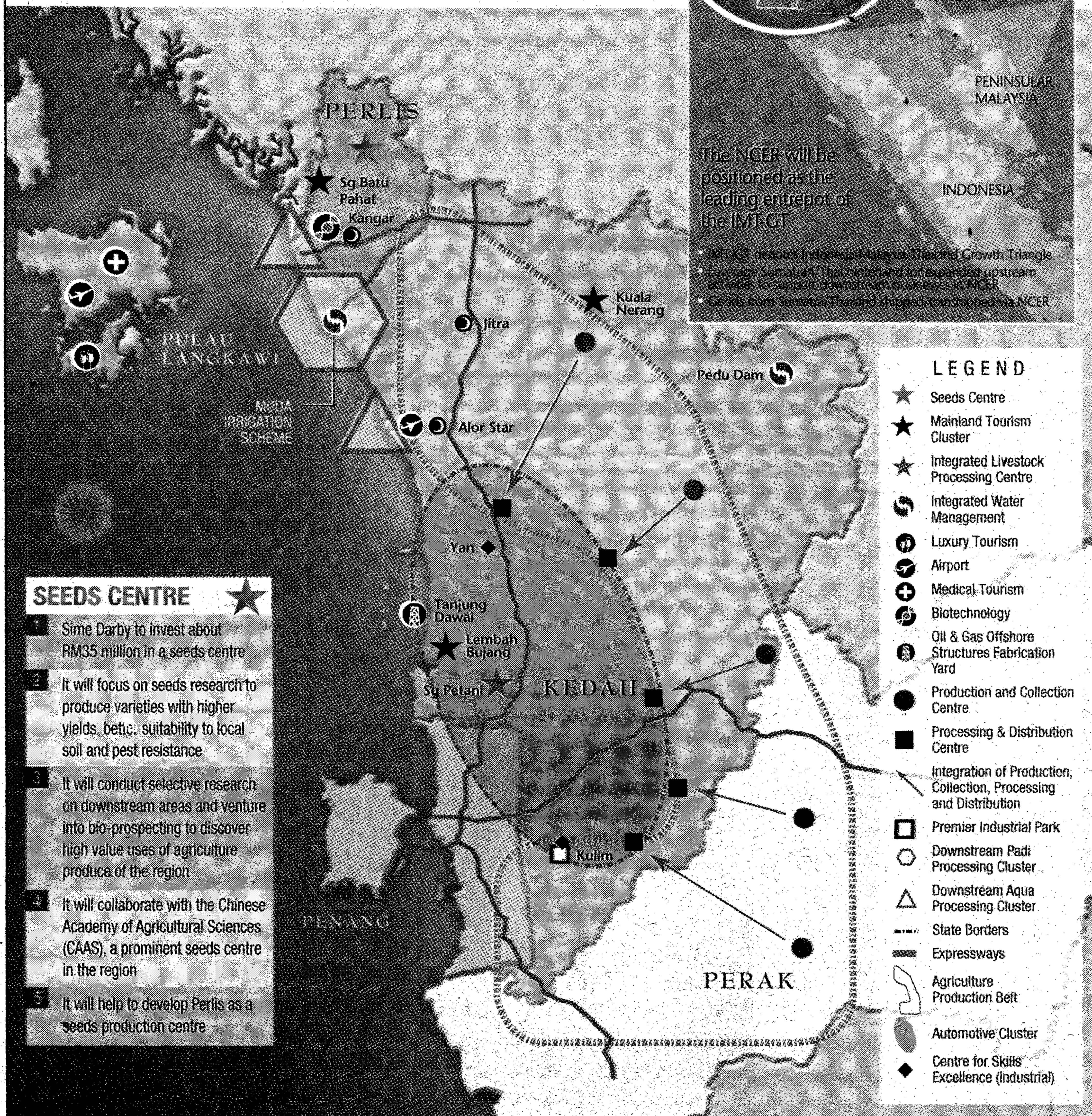
For herbs, horticulture and premium speciality food products, niche areas for the farming of premium crops with controlled and sterilised environments will be developed.

About 390,000ha of NCER are under oil palm plantation companies, while some 20,000ha are rubber smallholdings.

Among specific initiatives to improve commercial crops are encouraging the Federal Land Development Authority and plantation firms to disseminate modern agronomic practices and introducing mixed farming methods within oil palm and rubber estates to raise income. — Bernama



The Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER) Blueprint is an economic and social development initiative aimed at unleashing the region's potential and elevating the income levels of the rakyat in the four northern states of Malaysia.



SEEDS CENTRE ★

- 1 Sime Darby to invest about RM35 million in a seeds centre
- 2 It will focus on seeds research to produce varieties with higher yields, better suitability to local soil and pest resistance
- 3 It will conduct selective research on downstream areas and venture into bio-prospecting to discover high value uses of agriculture produce of the region
- 4 It will collaborate with the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS), a prominent seeds centre in the region
- 5 It will help to develop Perlis as a seeds production centre

MAJOR PROJECTS FOR PERLIS AND KEDAH

- PERLIS**
- Building of an inland container depot.
 - Border town development to facilitate economic links with neighbouring countries
 - Seeds R&D and indigenous biotech centre.
 - Coastal Highway from Kuala Perlis to Simpang Empat, Perak. This will involve widening existing roads and building new ones to facilitate distributive services in the NCER.
 - Climatic fruit clusters: The planting of fruits will generate new sources of income for farmers and increase sources of export growth for the country.
- KEDAH**
- High-end tourism: The plan is to offer 6-star destinations on the outer islands of Langkawi supported by premium attractions such as art galleries, yachting, boutique shops and entertainment.
 - Medical tourism will be promoted, leveraging on the air connectivity to

- neighbouring countries like Indonesia and Thailand.
- Premier industrial park in Kulim to handle manufacturing of products which can successfully compete with products from China, India and other countries in the region.
- Central Spine: This will involve straightening, widening and building new roads to improve transportation in the region.
- Irrigation and flood mitigation: Currently, 89.3 per cent of padi areas in the NCER is irrigated, compared with 98.3 per cent in Selangor. The poorer irrigation is a contributing factor to lower yields, which range from three to five tonnes per hectare, compared with six tonnes per hectare for Selangor. An integrated irrigation and water management system includes extending, widening and deepening canals, building reservoirs and developing man-made lakes.
- Halal hub in Sungai Petani which will enable high-value products to be processed and manufactured for export to neighbouring countries and the Middle East.

Tomorrow: Focus on Penang and Perak