

Logistics boost for Penang

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BUTTERWORTH: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday launched the Penang chapter of the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER) blueprint which will see the state emerging as the nerve centre for logistics and transport in the northern region of the country and the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT).

After launching the RM177 billion NCER blueprint in Kedah for the northern states of Kedah, Perlis, Penang and Perak on Monday, Abdullah unveiled the projects earmarked for Penang which will see the state's existing infrastructure for air, sea, rail and road being given a tremendous boost.

Also present was his wife Jeanne Abdullah, Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mahadzir Khalid, Perlis Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim, Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali, cabinet ministers and state leaders.

"Given the tremendous boost in development within the NCER with the heightened economic activities especially in agriculture, manufacturing and processing sectors, it is vital for a logistics nerve centre to be in place for the movement of people and produce efficiently.

"For the goods to be transported and marketed effectively, there must be an integrated logistics network and Penang has it all with the close proximity to the North-South Highway, Penang Bridge, ports and international airport.

"Though these are in good stead now to meet current needs, we have to expand these facilities to meet the demands of the NCER and hence the main thrust for Penang in the context of the NCER is to upgrade and enhance Penang's strength as a regional logistics hub and to serve as the gateway to the northern corridor," Abdullah added.

The highlights of turning Penang into the main transport hub for NCER includes the:

- » expansion of Penang Port to allow

larger vessels to berth with deepening of the container wharves and expansion of the container yards. It includes restructuring the management of the Penang Port Commission and Penang Port Sdn Bhd.

- » expansion of Penang airport to handle more cargo and passenger traffic, making it the premier air cargo hub within the IMT-GT to support industrial parks and create premium overseas markets for perishable high value products. The airport expansion plans include:

- » developing new passenger and cargo terminals; and
- » the addition of a new runway to cater to increased traffic.

- » enhancement of public transport system in the state through four main projects:

1. RapidPenang bus services (*see accompanying story*),
2. high-speed ferry services for pedestrians and motorcyclists next year in addition to existing ferry services,
3. a central transport hub called the Penang Sentral project which will see the sleepy town of Butterworth given a royal rousing with an RM2 billion development project – an integrated terminal for rail, road and sea travel being jointly developed by Malaysian Resources Corporation Berhad (MRCB) and Pelaburan Hartanah Bumiputra Berhad,
4. the Penang monorail project.

Other projects earmarked include the development of:

- » the Penang Global City Centre – an RM18 billion, 15-year development project on the current Penang Turf Club site touted to be the very first carbon-zero city in the world.

The city centre with two iconic towers akin to the Petronas twin towers will be promoted as an international MICE destination.

- » Pulau Jerejak as a regional medical tourism centre.

- » a Micro-electronics Centre of Excellence at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) to boost local workforce efficiency in the electronics and electrical sectors.