

# Malaysia moves to woo investors from China

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**JOHOR BARU:** Efforts are being intensified to promote Malaysia as a top investment destination for businessmen from China, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

In closed-door meetings with top entrepreneurs and business leaders from China here, Abdullah said they expressed keen interest in the business opportunities available in Malaysia and the country's industries.

The businessmen also wanted more promotional activities on the Iskandar Development Region to be conducted in China, Abdullah said.

The degree of interest is expected to redress the investment imbalance between the two countries.

Malaysian companies have invested US\$320 million (RM1.1 billion) in China but Malaysia has on-

ly received US\$30 million (RM103.2 million) in return.

"They asked about the Ninth Malaysia Plan, visas and the industries we are promoting. I believe that we will see more trade and investment in the future.

"There are also many things about the Iskandar that should be promoted as it is something new for them," Abdullah said.

The prime minister had earlier delivered the keynote address at the Malaysia-China Business Forum here yesterday.

Present at the forum were Malaysia-China Business Council (MCBC) chairman Tun Musa Hitam and China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) vice-chairman Yu Ping.

In his speech, Abdullah said Malaysia was committed to increasing trade.

"As shown in a survey published in the June 28 edition of the *International Herald Tribune*, an overwhelming 83 per cent of Malaysians view China as a positive influence — one of the highest

among Asean countries."

CCPIT also announced that it was promoting Malaysia to investors from the mainland.

It told the prime minister and government officials in a closed-door meeting that it was bringing a large group of investors from China to Malaysia next month.

"The MCBC will try to assist them as much as possible," Musa said.

Yu said the promotional moves would help push the two countries' trade past the US\$50 billion mark by 2010, which had been set previously by the leaders of China and Malaysia.

"Currently, trade between our countries is growing at double-digit rates, so it is not impossible that we will hit US\$50 billion by 2010," Yu said.

Abdullah told reporters after chairing a meeting of the Iskandar Development Authority that the construction sector had bounced back from its slump due to new infrastructure development.

In the first quarter of this year, the sector recorded four per cent

growth compared with a shrinkage of 0.5 per cent last year, he said.

To further boost the sector's growth, the cabinet has decided to exempt construction companies from a ruling requiring them to buy cranes from only one local source.

The cabinet will also look into complaints regarding the supply and prices of steel bars and cement.

"The demand for the cranes is rising so fast that we cannot allow the contractors and ports to wait for supplies from one source.

"At the same time, (Deputy Prime Minister) Datuk Seri Najib Razak will be chairing a committee that will look into the availability of steel and cement and he will report to the cabinet," Abdullah said.

On June 25, the Master Builders Association said controlled prices and supply of steel bars and cement were hurting the construction sector and would raise its operating costs.