

Unleashing the North

PM launches initiative to accelerate economic growth

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BY WONG SAI WAN

newsdesk@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: The second of four economic corridors that make up the bulk of the 9th Malaysia Plan development programmes will be launched in Alor Star by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today.

The Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER), which covers the peninsula's four north-most states of Perlis, Kedah, Penang and Perak, is a Government initiative to accelerate economic growth and elevate income levels.

The overall theme for the NCER initiative is "Increasing value-add from existing industries", emphasising transformation and expansion of the agricultural, manufacturing, tourism and logistics sectors in the region.

This is the common phrase that has been used by various officials when briefing the media, state authorities and the private sector about the NCER over the past few weeks.

At such briefings, it was also emphasised that the NCER was completely different from the Iskandar Development Region (IDR), which was launched earlier this year.

"While the IDR was about huge mega developments, the NCER is about unleashing the potentials that already exist.

"And while the IDR is about attracting foreign investors, the NCER is about getting

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SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL

Malaysian companies to do the same in the north," said one analyst who has been following the drawing up of both programmes.

Abdullah had at various times also reiterated that the focus on the NCER was also to ensure that issues such as rural development, agriculture and poverty were not neglected.

Senior government officials said together with the strengthening of existing sectors, namely agriculture, manufacturing and tourism, the NCER initiative would also seek to develop new industries in the region.

"These include the cultivation of new commercial crops and the promotion of downstream activities in the agricultural sector, biotechnology, sustainable materials and oil and gas.

"The development programmes of the NCER will also seek to leverage its well-established transport infrastructure and geographical proximity to Thailand and Sumatra to become the processing, logistics and trade centre for international region," said a senior official.

At the launching of the 9MP last year, Abdullah also announced that Sime Darby Bhd had been given the task of drawing up the master plan for the NCER.

According to Sime Darby chief executive officer Datuk Seri Ahmad Zuber Murshid, teams of experts went down to the ground, worked together with various state and federal agencies, pored over documents and statistics and sought input from farmers, stakeholders and the private sector to draw up the current plan.

It will be a busy two days for the Prime Minister and the proponents of the NCER as there will be another launch at Perlis later this afternoon where the National Seeds Centre will be unveiled.

Tomorrow, Abdullah will be in Seberang Prai, Penang where he will launch Penang as the NCER integrated logistic hub as well as RapidPenang, Penang's new bus service.

In the afternoon, he will be in Selinsing in Perak's Kerian district where he will launch various human capital initiatives for the NCER.