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WHILE much has been written and said about the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER) to be launched soon in Kedah by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, its success depends on a number of crucial factors.

As a nation we have not been short on master plans over the years and have had plenty of experience with them, including the five-year Malaysia plans. We are in the Ninth Malaysia Plan which means we have been doing this for close to half a century, just five years short of how long we have been independent.

Most of our master plans have looked pretty impressive on paper but not a lot of them have been executed well enough to provide their full benefits to the public, especially the poorer sections towards whom many of the plans are targeted.

The NCER is quite different from the plan in the south to develop regions adjacent to Singapore, known as the Iskandar Development Region or IDR, where the focus is to bring in foreign investors to set up shop and to provide the necessary infrastructure to attract them.

While the NCER will also have elements of that, a huge part of its success will depend on how well the ambitious plan will help to raise farm and rural incomes by more proficient farming and centralised purchase of farm produce to give farmers a fair price.

And the impact that it will have in the northern states of Kedah,

Perak, Penang and Perlis will affect the Malay heartland in Peninsular Malaysia and therefore will have a direct bearing on increasing the incomes and giving a better life to a significant number of Malays.

And considering that it is a huge area that the master plan will cover, the amount of coordination between the various state agencies will have to be superlative. That is a tough task seen in the context of already inefficient state agencies Malaysia-wide and how much politics plays a part in the distribution of the tools which will enable the rural sector to pick itself out of depressed incomes and conditions.

Not only must coordination improve but the very efficiency of all the various state agencies entrusted with implementation has to be greatly increased. For the NCER to work well and achieve its objectives, new people with private-sector style drive and objectives should be in the seat.

Otherwise all the effort that Sime Darby has put in coming out with a master plan is going to be wasted despite the details that have been outlined to get farm yields up, increase crop diversity, use better seeds, and have more planting cycles.

The NCER is a complicated plan, in some ways more so than the IDR, and for it to be able to bring about the needed changes and benefits to the people, everything will be in the execution.

If that fails, the master plan fails.