

PM to unveil masterplan for northern region

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KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi will launch a masterplan to spur growth and boost income levels in the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER), which is home to 4.29 million people, in Kedah today.

At the launch, to be aired live over RTM, Abdullah is expected to unveil a slew of projects aimed at transforming and expanding the agricultural, manufacturing, logistics and tourism sectors of the

north, covering the states of Perlis, Kedah, Penang and northern Perak.

The Northern Corridor, one of the regions identified under the Ninth Malaysia Plan for the promotion of balanced and equitable national economic development, is to be developed over a period of more than 20 years.

Sime Darby Bhd has been given the job of drawing up the comprehensive development blueprint which covers four Malaysia plans,

from 2007 to 2025.

The event in Kedah, the first stop in the premier's two-day visit to the four states, will be held at the Muda Agricultural Development Authority (Mada) area where Abdullah is also scheduled to launch Mada's estate management programme.

Abdullah is also due to visit Perlis later today where he will be opening the Seed Research and Development Centre, initiated by Sime Darby.

Under the plan, Perlis will

have an inland container depot, border town development, seed production centre and climatic fruit cluster programmes.

Perlis and Kedah have been earmarked as the nation's premier food production centre, using modern agricultural management practices and management.

Tomorrow, he will unveil plans to convert Penang into a regional logistics hub in Butterworth.

He is also due to launch the new RapidPenang bus service.

His final stop will be in Perak, where he will announce plans to turn Perak into a human capital development centre. He is scheduled to launch a centre of skills excellence and the education ministry's Pintar programme.

According to Sime Darby Group chief executive Datuk Seri Ahmad Zubir Murshid, eradicating poverty is one of the challenges in the NCER initiative.

The region accounts for 17% of Malaysian households living in poverty and 29% of Malaysian households living in hardcore poverty.

The monthly average household income in the region is at a relatively low of RM2,477 - the lowest among the six regions in the country except for the east coast.

"This is our greatest challenge, to bring about a

balance in the income level and also to eradicate hardcore poverty by 2010," he told Bernama.

Malaysia aims to halve the current 5.7% poverty rate and eradicate hardcore poverty by 2010.

Under the plan, the target is to increase average padi yield a hectare from four tonnes to eight tonnes in 2012, and to accelerate the electrical and electronics sector's move towards higher value-added activities such as design and research and development.

Key tourism assets such as Langkawi and Penang will be enhanced to attract higher-yielding tourists.

The initiative also plans to develop new industries in the region such as the cultivation of new commercial crops and the promotion of downstream activities in the agricultural sector.

Others include promoting new manufacturing activities such as biotechnology, sustainable materials and oil and gas.

The plan includes leveraging on the NCER's well-established transport infrastructure and geographical proximity to Thailand and Sumatra to become the processing, logistics and trade centre for the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT). - Bernama