

Ghani: Bumiputeras will not lose out in Iskandar

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JOHOR BARU: The Johor government has pledged that Bumiputeras would not be left behind in the Iskandar Development Region.

In allaying concerns that Malays would lose out after the federal government abolished foreign investment regulations favouring them in special zones in Iskandar, the Johor government announced several measures meant to ensure that Bumiputera economic interests would be looked after.

The most significant proposal involved setting up a property trust that

would purchase Malay land in the 2,000-acre special zone so that these assets could be developed jointly with an agency or a company.

Another move calls for the mobilisation of Bumiputera government agencies such as the Majlis Amanah Rakyat (Mara) to compete on an equal footing with foreign and local companies in developing the region.

In disclosing the proposals, Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman said they were agreed on at a meeting yesterday between Johor Umno state liaison leaders and the

party's grassroots leaders.

"They expressed worries and fears that Malays would be left out of Iskandar since the government exempted companies and investors from abiding by FIC (foreign investment committee) rules within certain zones.

"With these proposals, the Malays will have a chance to participate in Iskandar," Ghani said after the meeting here.

On March 23, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi announced that foreign investors in five zones in Iskandar would not have

to follow FIC regulations with regard to Bumiputera ownership.

FIC rules state that foreign investors must allow Bumiputeras a 30 per cent share of their businesses.

The rule has been described as a major obstacle in attracting foreign investment.

Ghani explained that the property trust's holdings could be opened to and collectively owned by other Malays.

"There are places in the zones where the FIC does not apply but which Malays have lots of land such

as Kampung Majidi, Skudai Kiri, Tanjung Pelepas, Gelang Patah and Kempas.

"So these assets can be owned by the trust, developed jointly with a company or agency, and the dividends can be shared out collectively."

He added that the entity would be formulated and established by year-end.

He said a 10-man team would be formed by Johor Umno to explain Iskandar and the state government's measures to protect Malay interests to grassroots Umno members.