

# Special panel to boost investments in Iskandar

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**LANGKAWI:** A special ministerial committee will be formed by Malaysia and Singapore to focus solely on bringing in investments and facilitating business and tourism in southern Johor's Iskandar Development Region.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the committee would comprise a minister from each country and other ministers will be invited to join in when related issues involving specific projects and programmes were involved.

He said it would be a general committee and not a consultative committee.

A consultative committee could imply the need to refer to each government in making decisions, which would be unfair to Malaysia, as Iskandar is a Malaysian project, and not a joint venture with another country.

Abdullah said the committee would discuss in detail the informal discussions he had with his Singaporean counterpart Lee Hsien Loong here yesterday and other matters to be deliberated further later.

"This committee is exclusively for Iskandar and it can invite any ministers at any time to discuss the details," he said here after sending Lee off at the end of their two-day informal meeting yesterday.

Among the ministers at the discussions were Works Minister



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his Singapore counterpart, Lee Hsien Loong, sharing a light moment after the Malaysia-Singapore delegation meeting in Langkawi yesterday.

Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Chan Kong Choy, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said and Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Abdul Ghani Othman.

Abdullah said the idea for the committee came about after he brought up the need for easier access between Iskandar and Singapore to Lee, who then suggested such a committee as the best avenue. He said among the first

items to be discussed would be the introduction of a smart card.

"We want to make sure the smart card is safe, not easily cloned and how best to use it. This is for both Singaporean citizens doing business or visiting Iskandar and also for those working in Iskandar who want to go to Singapore.

"We don't want people to spend too much time at the customs, immigration and quarantine (CIQ) checkpoint."

The original proposal to introduce a passport-free region in

Iskandar late last year was scrapped early last month due to concerns that the area could be flooded with foreigners.

The replacement would be smart card access, having similar features as the present Malaysian passport that contains a smart chip.

Abdullah said Malaysia wanted to encourage easier access to Iskandar but not free access.

"No country in the world allows free access," he added.

The prime minister said the special committee would also discuss co-operation to promote tourism in both countries and ways to expedite the flow of tourists at the CIQ checkpoint.

"For example, maybe we can have tour buses stop at one point and bring in an immigration officer to check passengers' passports inside the buses. When a tour bus stops at the CIQ point, the officer can just announce its arrival without having to check them again one by one.

"Maybe there would be better ideas to make it easier for tourists to visit both our countries. The committee will deliberate on this and other matters."

At an earlier joint press conference with Abdullah here yesterday, Lee said Singapore had decided that Iskandar would be fundamentally good for the republic.

"I suggested to Pak Lah that we need to set up a ministerial committee to discuss further on this," he added.