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'Johor sports projects not waste of money'

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'BIG RETURNS': It is an investment for the rakyat, says PM

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JOHOR'S massive sports projects, worth RM439 million, to be undertaken in the next three years, should not be seen as a waste of the government's money, but as an investment for the rakyat, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said yesterday.

"The returns (on the investment) are big, especially for the rakyat, as we seek a work-life balance," he said when launching the two projects at

Tan Sri Dato' Haji Hassan Yunus Stadium in Larkin here yesterday.

The two projects consist of the construction of four stadiums.

The RM350 million Arena Larkin and RM89 million Mount Austin Track and Field Stadium will be built by two giant state government companies — the Johor Corporation and Kumpulan Prasarana Rakyat Johor Sdn Bhd (KPRJ), respectively.

The 42ha Arena Larkin project includes the construction of Johor Baru City Council's 7,000-capacity indoor stadium with badminton and sepak takraw courts, refurbishment of the council's existing swimming complex into an aquatic centre, and the Tan Sri Dato' Hassan Yunus Stadium, which will be a full football stadium.

The Mount Austin 5,000-capacity stadium is a project by KPRJ.

It will be equipped with a running track, training field, futsal courts and a world-class gymnasium, among other facilities.

Najib described the projects, which would see four stadiums being built, as "special and unique".

"For two state government-owned companies to undertake such massive projects is a testament of the state's prowess as an economic powerhouse," Najib said.

"It will not only propel sports development in the state, but the country."

Najib also said that sports united the people and broke racial barriers, as reflected during past international sports events.

"During the Rio Olympics, we were glued to the television when Malaysian athletes competed. When they win, we are so proud of them and the country.

"And when they win, too, there will be calls for the government to declare a public holiday the next day," he said to the laughter of the audience.

"We want our athletes to be successful, not only at local and regional meets, but also internationally."

Citing the Darul Ta'zim (JDT) football team, Najib said the team's success was also Malaysia's success.

The prime minister lauded Johor's preparedness to host the Malaysia Games (Sukma) in 2020.

Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin said as a sports trendsetter, Johor aimed to be the best Sukma host.

"Although Sukma is a national-level games, we aim to provide world-class facilities," he said.

Khaled said although Johor could be proud of JDT, it should

not stop there.

"It is our hope to see Johoreans excel in sports. We hope both projects can be a catalyst to achieve this.

"The process of looking for new young sports talents will not go well without having such world-class facilities," he said.

Arena Larkin will be developed by JCorp's subsidiary, Johor Land Bhd (JLand). JLand will also construct a 1km boulevard linking Larkin Sentral Bus Terminal to the stadium.

Several areas at Arena Larkin have been earmarked for commercial activities related to sports.

The Mount Austin Track and Field Stadium will take 36 months to complete.

Najib is currently on a two-day working visit to Johor, which began yesterday.