

## UNLOCKING DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

# Federal govt makes deal with Kedah to rezone parts of Alor Star

**BALING:** The federal government has reached a deal with Kedah to rezone more areas of Alor Star for commercial, residential and industrial use, thus reducing agricultural land in the city.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said the decision followed discussions between the federal and state governments aimed at unlocking the city's development potential.

"When I spoke to the state government, they said Kedah is the nation's rice bowl, but how do we further develop Alor Star's industrial and residential zones?"

"I proposed the idea and the cabinet has agreed to expand commercial, industrial and housing zones and reduce padi land," he said in his speech at the closing of the Madani Rakyat programme here yesterday.

He said allocations in the 2026 Budget would reflect federal pri-

orities as well as state needs.

"I have requested that new projects for 2026 take into account both federal and state input, with adjustments to ensure suitability."

Anwar said federal allocations for Kedah would increase to RM9.7 billion this year from RM8.6 billion last year.

Major projects planned for the state include the Jeniang Water Transfer Project worth RM922 million, the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER) Industrial Development and Logistics Hub in Sidam worth RM700 million and flood mitigation work for Sungai Kedah and Anak Bukit worth RM641 million.

There are also the NCER Rubber City development in Ladang Ketapang worth RM628 million, the construction of additional buildings for Kulim Hospital worth RM588 million and the Sultanah Maliha Hospital in Langkawi

worth RM515 million.

The government also approved RM575 million worth of major road upgrades.

On another matter, Anwar recalled his involvement in the 1974 student demonstrations to champion the poor in Baling.

He said the event shaped his political journey.

He said the most important lesson was that leaders must always do their best for the people when entrusted with time and power.

"When I was told I would come to Baling, I said I was eager to go because of its history. I am thankful to friends who still remember the demonstration vividly.

"A few years before that, the late Tun Abdul Razak (then prime minister) launched the New Economic Policy to uplift the people through a two-pronged strategy, including poverty eradication regardless of race.

"But soon, severe hardship arose due to the drastic drop in rubber prices."

He said the suffering of poor families in Baling moved him when he was leading Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia.

"The poor, from Baling to Alor Star, rose up to demand justice. The news reached Kuala Lumpur. We (students) rallied in support.

"As a result, I was given a two-year 'rest' in Kamunting. That was 1974. That is why Baling has never left my memory."

The Baling demonstrations began on Nov 19, 1974 and peaked on Dec 1, when some 30,000 people protested rubber prices plunging from around 60 sen per catty (600g) to just 15 sen.

Thousands of students in Kuala Lumpur rallied in solidarity.

Anwar was jailed under the Internal Security Act for his involvement in the demonstration.