

THE MAKING OF A WORLD-CLASS METROPOLIS

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JOHOR BARU: The numbers and facts are impressive.

The most ambitious development project in the region. Some 800,000 jobs to be created over 20 years.

An area nearly three times the size of Singapore with passport-free zones for foreigners.

A project that can generate an average rate of growth of eight per cent for Johor.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said with the right execution, the Iskandar Development Region (Iskandar) could become a model of development for the world over the next five to 10 years.

"South Johor has it all — strategic location, strong air and sea lo-

gistical infrastructure, ample land, an educated workforce, vibrant culture and a progressive and visionary state government," said Abdullah.

"Truly, Iskandar is blessed with the elements that make a dynamic international metropolis. It remains for us to ensure that this immense potential is harnessed and realised for the benefit of all."

The Prime Minister was speaking at the official launch of Iskandar by the Sultan of Johor at a glittering ceremony in Danga Bay here that was telecast live by RTM.

The government will also create two free access zones for foreigners to live and work. There will be no Immigration and Customs check for entry into these zones.

Khazanah Nasional's senior

vice-president, Ismail Ibrahim, said these zones would be a magnet for businessmen and industrialists.

"The objective is to draw wealth to Johor. The key word is free access," he added.

Abdullah said the government was determined to deepen and accelerate the development of Iskandar in the coming years.

"I am confident Iskandar will provide a quantum leap in development to transform the region into another world-class metropolis of the country after Kuala Lumpur."

Under the masterplan, Iskandar will be transformed into a logistical hub by leveraging the ports at Tanjung Pelepas, Johor Port and Senai Airport.

New service industries will also be developed, such as cyber cen-

tres, a medical hub, an international Islamic finance centre, creative industrial parks and a centre for *halal* manufacturing.

World-class institutions of higher learning and research centres are going to be created to boost human capital development.

To kick-start these and other initiatives, the government has allocated RM4.3 billion under the Ninth Malaysia Plan.

Government-linked entities such as Khazanah Nasional and the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) will invest an additional RM3.4 billion.

Additionally, private sector investors, both local and foreign, are expected to inject massive amounts of capital into Iskandar over the next five to 10 years.

"Taken in total, we are expecting at least RM10 billion of invest-

ments in this region in the early phase of development."

The biggest names in international business, Abdullah added, were expected to locate here in due course.

The projects will be co-ordinated by a new statutory agency — South Johor Authority (SJA) — which will serve as a one-stop centre for processing plans and proposals.

SJA will be benchmarked against the region's best in terms of service standards to effectively support Iskandar's current and future partners.

"We mean business," stressed the Prime Minister.

"Our vision is to make south Johor the new international address for business, investment, leisure and culture. It will showcase all that Malaysia can be."