

Heading on the right track

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ISKANDAR Malaysia, which is now entering its seventh year, is progressing well and moving in the right direction.

Interest in the country's first economic growth corridor still remains strong despite the uncertainties over the global economic growth.

Other economic growth corridors in Malaysia are the Northern Economic Region, East Coast Economic Region, Sabah Development Corridor and Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy.

Investments in Iskandar Malaysia

For the period from 2006 up to Sept 30, 2012, Iskandar Malaysia received a total cumulative investment of RM99.79bil in various sectors with 42% spent on the ground.

Of the total RM99.7bil investments, 63% or RM62.70bil are domestic investments while 37% or RM37.09bil are from foreign investors.

From the total figure, manufacturing is the top recipient with RM33.36bil followed by properties (RM32.94bil), utilities (RM9.52bil) government (RM7.31bil), tourism (RM2.03bil) and others (RM14.63bil).

Iskandar Regional Development Authority (Irda) is confident of reaching the RM100bil mark by the end of the year.

Irda is the regulatory authority mandated to plan, promote and facilitate the development of Iskandar Malaysia into an international metropolis by 2025.

Launched on Nov 4, 2006, Iskandar Malaysia is located in the southernmost part of Johor covering 2,217sq km and is three times bigger than Singapore and two times the size of Hong Kong.

Initially, it was known as the South Johor Economic Region but was changed to

Iskandar Malaysia on April 2008, after the Johor ruler, the late Sultan Iskandar ibni Almarhum Sultan Ismail.

Almarhum Sultan Iskandar was the father of the present-day Johor Sultan – Sultan Ibrahim and the fourth Sultan of modern Johor.

The first sultan was Almarhum Sultan Sir Abu Bakar ibni Almarhum Temenggong Daeng Ibrahim, the second was Almarhum Sultan Sir Ibrahim ibni Almarhum Sultan Sir Abu Bakar and the third was Almarhum Sultan Sir Ismail ibni Almarhum Sultan Sir Ibrahim.

Iskandar Malaysia is divided into five flagship development zones – the JB City Centre, Nusajaya, Eastern Gate Development Zone, Western Gate Development Zone and Senai-Kulai.

Despite receiving good response from domestic and foreign investors, Irda is not resting on its laurels and is putting in more efforts to continue attracting new investments into Iskandar Malaysia.

Irda does not specifically segregate its investor-centric strategies into foreign or domestic; instead it aims to have value proposition strategies and incentives to attract investors.

By not discriminating between domestic and foreign investors, Iskandar Malaysia will be able to spread the cake and avoid being dependent on a few.

Irda is looking at investment averaging between RM15bil and RM20bil yearly from 2011 to 2015, up from RM10bil to RM15bil targeted from 2006 to 2010 and from RM20bil to RM25bil from 2020 to 2025.

Investment target

The target of RM382bil investments must be achieved by 2025, in order for Iskandar Malaysia to succeed as outlined in the



The oil and gas sector is one of the nine promoted economic clusters in Iskandar Malaysia and will play a significant role in creating economic spillover.

Comprehensive Development Plan, which runs from 2006 until 2025.

Iskandar Malaysia must remain as a preferred investment destination regardless of the economic situation by offering competitive cost of doing business and all the right ingredients for investments.

These include soft and hard infrastructures whether in telecommunications, roads, ability to combat crime and high level of safety and security and a ready pool of skilled and talented workforce.

The first phase (2006-2010) of Iskandar Malaysia involved planning and foundation building.

The challenge that time was more in setting and having the right plan in order to enable sustainability and Iskandar Malaysia has passed that stage.

The second stage (2011-2016) is all about growth and expanding and delivering more, ensuring the deliverables will be able to create the right impact.

The completion of several catalytic projects in Iskandar Malaysia has created more eco-

nomical opportunities directly and indirectly for all, including businesses and residents.

Among the projects worth mentioning are the Legoland Theme Park Malaysia, Puteri Harbour Indoor Theme Park, Johor Premium Outlets and Newcastle Medical University Malaysia.

In the last five to six years, investments in Iskandar Malaysia had created more than new 60,000 jobs at the end of 2010, bringing the total workforce to 660,000 from 600,000.

Connectivity and accessibility within Iskandar Malaysia have also improved with the upgrading of the existing roads and the opening of new highways.

These include the New Coastal Highway, Eastern Dispersal Link Expressway, Senai-Pasir Gudang-Desaru Highway, Senai Interchange, Ulu Tiram Highway, Jalan Skudai and Jalan Kolam Ayer.

Improvement in connectivity and accessibility has indeed brought economic spillover to areas which were not popular in the past and created new development growth areas within Iskandar Malaysia.

City centre all set for vibrant transformation

JOHOR Baru city centre is set to transform itself into a vibrant place within the next five to seven years under the multi-billion ringgit transformation project.

The RM1.8bil project is one of the initiatives outlined by the Iskandar Regional Development Authority (Irda) under its Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP) which runs from 2006-2025.

Under the CDP, Irda has been tasked to transform the southernmost part of Johor spanning 2,217sq km into an international metropolis by 2025.

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It is vital to redevelop and rejuvenate Johor Baru city centre in line with its status as one of the five flagship development zones in Iskandar Malaysia.

During Sultan Abu Bakar's reign (1862-1895), Johor Baru was one of the "most modern and developed towns" in the Malay States due to the large presence of British and Chinese businessmen.

"Vibrant" indicates activities that would generate an influx of people into the city centre, throughout the day.

This could be done by turning heritage buildings or those with attractive architectural elements into offices, food and beverage outlets and boutique hotels. The same would apply to residential properties, condominium towers, office blocks and retail centres.



An aerial view of Johor Baru city centre – one of the five flagship development zones in Iskandar Malaysia.

The "History and Culture" theme has been chosen for the transformation project as it reflects the long history of Johor Baru.

Other cities abroad which have more or less the same theme include those in Britain such as Stratford-On-Avon, Cambridge, Oxford, Kent-At-Canterbury and Johor Baru's sister city Istanbul.

Johor Baru town has humble beginnings as a small Malay fishing village. Originally known as Tanjung Puteri, it was founded in 1855 by Temenggong Daeng Ibrahim, the father of Sultan Abu Bakar.

Sultan Abu Bakar, famously known as the "Father of Modern Johor", changed the name to Johor Baru after he moved the seat of the government from Teluk Blangah in Singapore to Johor in 1866.

The redevelopment covers 485.62ha in the city central area including Bukit Timbalan, the former site of Lumba Kuda low-cost flats, Bukit Chagar Customs, Immigration and Quarantine Complex, Tanjung Puteri Lorry Customs complex and areas within the Johor Zoo, the Ayer Molek prison and Hospital Sultanah Aminah.

The project will start with the construction of a sewerage treatment plant to revitalise Sungai Segget in January next year and will be followed by Jalan Wong Ah Fook in April.

The RM1.8bil project includes RM270mil to open up, clean and beautify Sungai Segget, one of the dirtiest rivers in the country.

It flows along Jalan Wong Ah Fook in downtown Johor Baru and several years ago, RM6mil was spent to cover up the river, which is 1.4km long and 25m wide.

The rehabilitation of Sungai Segget will start from the Tropical Inn Hotel and up to the seagate of the watergate of the old Customs, Immigration and Quarantine complex.

It will take about 24 months to complete the rehabilitation and rejuvenation of Sungai Segget and the success of the cleaning-up work will be the focal point of the entire redevelopment project.

Sungai Segget has been chosen as the first component of the transformation project as it is the "heart" of Johor Baru city.

Once the river is clean and back to its days of glory, the river will function as a tourism attraction, like in Venice and Amsterdam.

Gondolas and flat-bottomed boats carrying tourists could ply the river just as it is done in the two European cities.

The landscaping of the new Sungai Segget – themed "Green and Water" will allow people to sit along the river banks for relaxation.

With the opening of the river, Jalan Wong Ah Fook will be partially turned into a non-vehicular traffic road to allow visitors to enjoy walking in the area instead of driving.