

Visiting foreign journalists given briefing on the SDC

KOTA KINABALU (Tues.) – Sabah will become the top five most liveable places in Asia by the year 2025 with the implementation of the Sabah Development Corridor (SDC), according to IDS Executive Director, Datuk Dr Mohd Yaakub Hj Johari.

This is one of the goals of the SDC, Dr Mohd Yaakub said when he briefed a group of visiting journalists at the IDS Conference Room yesterday. The 30-member group comprised 17 foreign journalists from Zimbabwe, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Ukraine, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Laos, Seychelles, Brunei and Indonesia. The rest were Malaysians.

Dr Mohd Yaakub said efforts to make Sabah among the most liveable places in Asia will be achieved over a three-phase period. “Phase 1 will focus on addressing the basics to support tourism development and laying the foundations for future growth. World-class tourism infrastructure and services will be put in place, including nurturing a vibrant arts and culture scene.

“Phase 2 will focus on strengthening Sabah’s position as a premier eco-adventure destination through conservation, research and sustainable development of new tourism products anchored by signature resorts.

“Phase 3 will see Sabah being transformed into one of the most liveable places in Asia – a bustling metropolis within a tropical paradise.”

The other major goals of the SDC are to: triple Sabah’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita to RM14,800; quadruple GDP by four times to RM63.2 billion;

create more than 900,000 new jobs; reduce unemployment to 3.5% (from 5.8% in 2006); and eradicate poverty.

Dr Mohd Yaakub said the agricultural sector will play a major role in helping to eradicate poverty especially among the rural poor. He said specific high impact projects would be undertaken to involve the rural poor and to bring them out of the poverty trap.

He cited the Pulau Banggi High Impact Rural Development Programme in which 4,000 hectares would be developed into rubber plantations by Felcra Bhd for the hardcore poor on the island. The programme, launched by Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi last year, was modelled on the agropolitan concept of developing the rural agricultural sector to eradicate poverty.

He said other poverty eradication measures include encouraging the low income group to participate in planting of cash crops such as padi and jatropha, a new industrial crop which thrives even in areas of poor rainfall and irrigation such as the Bengkoka Peninsula, Kota Marudu, Keningau and Tenom.

Aside from assisting in poverty eradication, Dr Mohd Yaakub said the agriculture sector will focus on increasing overall food self-sufficiency and planting high-value crops for export.

Oil palm will remain the leading agricultural crop in Sabah and currently more than 1.2 million hectares are under oil palm cultivation. It contributed to 30% of the national crude palm oil (CPO) production in 2006. "The more than 1.2 million hectares could also be utilized for inter-cropping of other crops or for integrated farming, such as livestock," Dr Mohd Yaakub said. "This means that a further 1.2 million hectares are available for other economic activities," he added.

To lure investments into the SDC, Dr Mohd Yaakub said a competitive package of incentives will be provided to attract private sector investment in the promoted sectors – agriculture, services (tourism and logistics) and manufacturing.

“This will be supported by a boost in government investment in infrastructure development, which includes better roads and utilities coverage, as well as public service delivery system.

“Emphasis will also be placed on human capital development to support the growth of the targeted sectors.”

The journalists were on a week-long familiarization visit to Sabah as part of a six-week course organized by the Malaysian Press Institute (MPI) and Universiti Malaya. Leading the group was President of the Sabah Journalists Association, Datuk Joniston Bangkuai who thanked Dr Mohd Yaakub for receiving the journalists and giving them a comprehensive briefing on the SDC.

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IDS Executive Director, Datuk Dr Mohd Yaakub Hj Johari (2nd from right and back to camera) acknowledging the journalists as they were introduced to him by President of the Sabah Journalists Association, Datuk Joniston Bangkuai (right) just before the briefing which was held at the IDS Conference Room.