

GOVT'S ALL OUT TO ENHANCE SANDAKAN

SANDAKAN: Work is ongoing to revive Sandakan so that it will regain its glory days, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

He said tourism would become the town's key economic driver with the upgrading of the airport terminal together with the extension of the runway to accommodate larger aircraft.

"When the project is complete, there will be more direct flights from Japan, South Korea and China," he said when launching the runway extension project here yesterday.

Najib said he had also asked the state to expand Sandakan's golf course from nine to 18 holes, so that it could be of international standard. "Sabah has all it takes to draw tourists. There's the beautiful scenery, the wildlife, including the orang utan," said Najib, who added that about RM80mil had been allocated for the runway extension, a project not originally listed under the 11th Malaysia Plan. "In my last visit to Sandakan in March, I met the business community, who told me how important this project was," said Najib, who quickly called Transport Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai to get it approved. "If something will benefit Sabahans, I will approve it," said the Prime Minister, adding that he had given the nod for more projects in Sabah "than a predecessor who was in power for 22 years".

On education, Najib said everything was being done to ensure Sabahans would fill up at least 90% of the teaching posts in the state by 2020. "We are hiring and training more teachers from Sabah to achieve this," he told the crowd gathered for the Ekspresi Negaraku patriotism programme at the town padang.

The event saw the presence of personalities like wildlife biologist Dr Wong Siew Te, Mejar Noremazuan Nordin from the Royal Malaysian Air Force who took part in Ops Daulat in Lahad Datu, and mountain guide Nuhairi Kinta.

Other activities included a 3km run, a mass aerobic exercise, exhibitions by government agencies, and a concert featuring Dayang Nurfaizah, Hafiz Suip, Jacklyn Victor, Azharina and Mus of rock group May.

On coastal security, Najib said the Government was spending as much as RM300mil for the operations of the Eastern Sabah Security Command. He maintained that the Government listened to the people to know what they wanted.

"We have always made it a point to feel the pulse of the people," Najib said as he assured Sabahans there would be continuity in all that was being planned and implemented for the state. "When there are shocks like the Arab Spring, the only result is drought. There is no guarantee that any replacement would be better," he said.

Liow, who was also present, said the runway extension at the Sandakan airport would enable medium-sized aircraft such as the Boeing 737 and Airbus 320 to use the airport.

He said improvements were necessary as the number of passengers there increased from about 853,000 in 2015 to nearly 883,000 last year. Sabah received about one-third of the more than RM300mil allocation for air transport infrastructure under the 11th

Malaysia Plan, with some RM93mil being spent to improve airports and other related facilities in the state.

Liow said for this year, some RM41mil out of RM79mil was being spent for the development of transport in Sabah.

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