

NCER continues to attract high impact investments

IN 2022, the Northern Corridor Implementation Authority (NCIA) is aiming for the realisation of 17,000 jobs and RM20bil in investments in the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER), which consists of Penang, Kedah, Perak, and Perlis.

Recently retired NCIA chief executive Datuk Seri Jebasingam Issace John (pic) said efforts would continue strongly to attract high impact investments, with the targets of approving 28,000 job opportunities and RM23bil in investments.

Last year, the NCER had recorded the realisation of 18,299 jobs and RM23bil in investments.

Jebasingam, who retired at end-February, pointed out that the NCER made up the majority of approved manufacturing investments in the country, throughout the first to third quarters in 2021 at 61.4% of total investments.

The NCER's export trade performance grew 20% from the first to third quarters in 2020 and 2021, making up 38% and 36% of national exports respectively.

According to the **Statistics Department**, the key sectors driving this growth were electrical and electronics (E&E), and medical device manufacturing (includes rubber gloves, and professional, scientific and controlling instruments and apparatus), and palm oil products.

In 2020, the region's gross domestic product (GDP) was RM219bil, mean household income was RM5,477 and cumulative investment stood at RM131bil, with 151,000 jobs created and 28,000 local entrepreneurs.

Meanwhile, Jebasingam noted that under the NCER Strategic Development Plan (2021-2025), key targets include boosting the region's GDP to RM300bil and increasing the mean household income and median B40 household income to RM10,508 and RM4,203 respectively.

It also aims to attract a cumulative investment of RM146.5bil that will create over 161,000 jobs and nurture more than 42,000 local entrepreneurs.

Jebasingam pointed out that the NCER Strategic Development Plan (2021-2025), in addition to advancing economic growth, also aims to reduce regional imbalances and is anchored by the theme of "Shared prosperity through balanced regional development".

"This strategic framework aims to narrow the rural-urban development gap by driving sustainable economic growth and productivity in key priority sectors, through a holistic approach which encompasses the economic empowerment of the people, the strengthening of infrastructure to support connectivity and growth, social re-engineering, and conservation and preservation of the region's biodiversity."

Jebasingam, whose journey in the civil service has spanned over 45 years, was the CEO of the East Coast Economic Region Development Council, prior to joining NCIA in March 2019.

His accomplishments include developing plans for major urban centres in Selangor, and the planning and development of Langkawi, Kulim Hi-Tech Park and Putrajaya.

“Nation building and the well-being of the people has always been a passion of mine. I am honoured by the trust and responsibility given to me to lead a dedicated team of i-STARs with an aspiration of in developing the NCER focused on correcting regional imbalance,” he said.

Jebasingam said NCIA has successfully rolled out strategic projects, people-centric human capital programmes and facilitated high impact investments through its integrated three-pronged operational model with a solid foundation of internal business processes and governance.

“Moreover, with the establishment of a structured project delivery unit, I believe NCIA is ready to take leadership in industrial park and strategic infrastructure development and management,” he said.

To date, a total of RM60.29bil of private investment was facilitated by NCIA and more than 67,000 people in NCER were assisted through various people-centric human capital programmes.

Industrial parks and strategic infrastructures developed by NCIA include Kedah Rubber City and Chuping Valley Industrial Area.

Other notable upcoming high-impact strategic projects are Sidam Logistics, Automotive and Manufacturing Hub, SilverValley Technology Park, Perlis Inland Port and Kedah Eco-Innovation Park.

People-centric plan

Jebasingam and his team also implemented people-centric human capital programmes such as Kasih Ibu Programme, empowerNCER, JomKerja@NCER, JomNiaga@NCER, entrepreneurNCER, and NCER Talent Enhancement Programme (NTEP).

NTEP which aims to reduce unemployment among local graduates is also offered as an incentive for investors to meet their human resource needs.

To date, NTEP has benefited 2,784 postgraduate participants at NCER, who receive a minimum wage of RM2,500 per month.

In terms of empowering bumiputra entrepreneurs, the Dana Usahawan NCER (DU) has benefited 32 bumiputra companies to date, with a total investment of RM871.1mil.

“Such programmes empower the people so that they can improve their standard of living to a higher level,” said Jebasingam.

Meanwhile, the Kasih Ibu Programme was created due to the government’s concern about the important role played by mothers who are the main pillars of the family.

The programme has benefited 34,038 female participants as well as 149,133 dependents from the low-income group.

They can buy basic necessities worth up to RM250 per person at more than 60 panel retail outlets and 14 panels of supermarket chains using cashless payment cards and are eligible to receive health care worth up to RM500 per year from 120 private clinics.

Local entrepreneurs

Jebasingam noted that the entrepreneurNCER programme is targeted at local entrepreneurs who wish to expand their business.

“The empowerNCER-Academic has benefited 9,150 students, including 300 orang asli students, while the empowerNCER-Skills and Entrepreneurship has benefited 6,000 participants from the B40 group, some of whom have managed to generate additional income of up to RM1,500 in the first two months of participating in the programme,” he said.

“These people-centric human capital programmes are targeted at people from all walks of life, including the orang asli community. This inclusive approach is to ensure that no one is left behind in the socio-economic transformation in the region, especially the B40 group in the rural areas,” he added.

Jebasingam and his team also introduced the concept of “i-STARS” for NCIA employees, NCIA employees from various academic and professional backgrounds, and consist of university graduates as well as those with experience serving in both the public and private sectors.

NCIA also appoints industry experts who have more than 20 years of work experience to assist NCIA in specialised areas that require high expertise.

To date, the total number of i-STARS is 188, of which 56% are male employees and 44% are female employees.

Strategic sectors

Jebasingam said in the next five years, the NCER will focus on strategic manufacturing sectors including aerospace, E&E, as well as medical devices; agro-business and bio industry; petrochemicals; green economy; sustainable mining; and services ranging from tourism, logistics and connectivity, the digital economy, and education.

“NCER is now a world-class investment destination and technology hub offering a strategic location, a sustainable and investor-friendly business ecosystem, as well as an efficient network of infrastructure and transportation systems,” he said.

“It also has a well-trained workforce, strong industry-academic collaboration, attractive investment incentive packages, as well as a diversified industry that caters to investors from all sectors,” he added.

Jebasingam also expressed his appreciation and thanks to the NCIA Council members, the federal and state governments, the ministries and agencies investors, media as well as the people for their support and contribution towards efforts in elevating the development of the region.

He also noted that the unemployment rate in NCER stayed below the national unemployment rate throughout 2021, while the labour force participation rate steadily increased and is projected to continue doing so in 2022.

“The incidence of poverty and household income averages are expected to improve in 2021 following increased labour force participation and reduced unemployment across NCER in the same year,” said Jebasingam.

“In terms of the post-pandemic recovery plans, I think Malaysia is on the right trajectory. In the context of the NCER, looking at the 2021 to 2025 period, we expect economic growth to be 6.5% to 6.9% annually. We hope to maintain at least an average rate of about 5% to 6% annually,” he added.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/business/business-news/2022/04/11/ncer-continues-to-attract-high-impact-investments>