Star Special

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DAULAT TUANKU

Our King, our pride

Johor Ruler Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar, who is also the reigning King of Malaysia, celebrates his official birthday today with warm wishes from the rakyat.

Leadership grounded in integrity

By NELSON BENJAMIN
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The King granting an audience to Johor Mentri Besar Datuk Onn Hafiz Ghazi at Istana Pasir Pelangi in Johor Baru.

A cherished personal tradition, the King's signing of Aidilfitri greeting cards is a practice he has upheld for years.

KNOWN for his frankness and deep compassion for his subjects, His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia, has never hesitated to act when the welfare of the people is at stake.

Since ascending the Johor throne in 2010, Sultan Ibrahim has consistently demonstrated decisive leadership, often addressing difficult issues head-on, whether it involves public health, inclusiveness, social justice or even religion.

Today, as the 17th Yang di-Pertuan Agong, His Majesty continues to shine in his dedication to the people.

The Ruler has spoken on an array of issues, including corruption in the country, especially within the Armed Forces.

In February this year, Sultan Ibrahim warned that efforts to combat corruption must be carried out without compromise across all departments and agencies under the Johor government.

His Majesty stressed that integrity and administrative transparency are fundamental to safeguarding the state's well-being and sustained prosperity.

Describing graft as a betrayal of public trust, the King said such acts will not be tolerated in the country's administration under any circumstances.

Sultan Ibrahim has also made headlines when, upon realising the harm vaping could cause, His Majesty ordered a ban on the sale of vapes, vape liquids and e-cigarettes in the state, which took effect in 2016.

Johor was the first state in the country to implement such a bold move.

In 2017, Sultan Ibrahim also ordered a launderette in Muar to immediately end its discriminatory "Muslims only" policy, warning that failure to comply would lead to its closure.

Sultan Ibrahim also criticised a former Cabinet minister for giving a political talk in a mosque, emphasising that mosques in Johor should remain free from political influence.

The Ruler has also repeatedly emphasised inclusiveness.

In 2023, following allegations that a school in Johor Baru had invited only Muslim students to a Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia workshop, His Majesty decreed that no public programme should exclude anyone based on race or religion.

Sultan Ibrahim is active in using social media – particularly Facebook, where his official page has more than 1.2 million followers – using it as a platform to share his thoughts on issues close to his heart, such as environmental cleanliness and public health.

The Ruler remains deeply involved in charitable initiatives, particularly through the Sultan Ibrahim Johor Foundation, which has touched the lives of more than a million people to date.

The foundation, established in 2016, provides aid in areas such as housing, medical support and disaster relief, with a focus on ensuring help reaches those most in need.

Speaking about the foundation's work, managing trustee Datuk Avinderjit Singh said, "Since I joined in 2018, I've witnessed His Majesty's genuine concern for every individual.

"It is not just about giving aid. It's about seeing the people, understanding their struggles, and making sure we respond with dignity and compassion," he said, adding that the foundation's efforts were as extensive as they were impactful.

During the 2023 floods in Johor, His Majesty cut short a private trip abroad to coordinate aid from home, maintaining daily communication with officials and the foundation.

The foundation alone has prepared more than 103,000 tents to assist victims of natural disasters in Johor and other states.

When the Covid-19 pandemic struck, both Sultan Ibrahim and Her Majesty Raja Zarith Sofiah, Queen of Malaysia, provided unwavering support, ensuring food, medical aid and relief reached those who needed it most.

Beyond his charitable work, Sultan Ibrahim has long been a champion of inclusiveness and racial harmony.

Through initiatives such as the Bangsa Johor concept and the Kembara Mahkota Johor expedition, the King actively engages with communities across ethnic and social divides.

His Majesty has stressed that any issues with regards to religion should not be politicised by any party, which could harm and disrupt the country's unity and harmony.

On the issue of building temples, His Majesty decreed that it should be done in accordance with the law similar to the building of a mosque, Buddhist temple or church.

In 2018, Sultan Ibrahim personally acted as mediator in an incident involving the demolition of a Hindu temple in Seri Alam, Masai.

Sultan Ibrahim even donated money to the temple committee to help fund its relocation to another site.

More recently, Sultan Ibrahim also helped the Indian community resolve a problem spanning more than two decades by allocating a piece of land in Kampung Teluk Jawa to build a place where Hindus can conduct their final rites.

His Majesty visiting a Ramadan bazaar in Taman Lautan Biru, Mersing earlier this month. — Photos from Sultan Ibrahim's official Facebook page

His Majesty in a discussion with Abdul Rahim during a meeting at Istana Pasir Pelangi in Johor Baru.

Meanwhile, Johor Council of Royal Court President and longtime royal aide, Datuk Dr Abdul Rahim Ramli, described Sultan Ibrahim as a Ruler who is close to the people, a trait that has long been the hallmark of the Johor Sultanate.

"The Johor royals like to meet people. That's why the palaces in Johor are built within populated areas, not far away on a hill. They want the palace to be accessible to the rakyat," Abdul Rahim said.

During the King's visits to meet his subjects in the districts, Abdul Rahim said, Sultan Ibrahim would enter people's homes and sit cross-legged on the floor, enjoying simple dishes such as nasi putih, asam pedas, sambal belacan and ikan kering.

Abdul Rahim, who has written seven books on the royal family and Johor traditions, added that while each Johor Sultan has a unique personality, they all share a deep and unwavering commitment to the welfare of their people.

"They never want anyone to be marginalised. They always put the people first," he said, adding that Sultan Ibrahim wants the people to have progressive ideas, discipline, high integrity and a spirit of cooperation.

Sultan Ibrahim was crowned the fifth modern Sultan of Johor

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KEBAWAH DULI YANG MAHA MULIA SULTAN IBRAHIM

SULTAN YANG DIPERTUAN BAGI NEGERI DAN JAJAHAN TAKLUK JOHOR DARUL TA'ZIM YANG DI-PERTUAN AGONG

Merafak Sembah
Ucapan Setinggi-Tinggi Tahniah

Sempena
Sambutan Ulang Tahun Hari Keputeraan Rasmi Sultan Johor

Pada 23 Mac 2026 Bersamaan 3 Syawal 1447 Hijrah

Dengan Segala Hormat Takzimnya
Yang Berdatang Sembah

Sime Darby Property

Lembaga Pengarah, Pengurusan dan Warga Kerja Sime Darby Property.

Sultan Ibrahim gracing the 271st meeting of the Conference of Rulers at Istana Negara in Kuala Lumpur in February this year. The meeting was chaired by the Sultan of Terengganu, Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin (left).

His Majesty launching the Maharani Freeport at the Maharani Energy Gateway Complex in Tanjung Emas, Muar, last November. Looking on are (from left) Johor Regent Tunku Ismail Sultan Ibrahim, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Maharani Energy Gateway Sdn Bhd executive chairman Datuk Dr Daing A. Malek Daing A. Rahaman.

Strengthening local and global relations

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in March 2015, marking the first coronation in the state since that of his grandfather, Almarhum Sultan Ismail, in 1960.

A seasoned investor with diverse local and international ventures, the Ruler often includes state officials and heads of government-linked companies on his trips to explore opportunities that benefit Johor.

Last August, Sultan Ibrahim graciously travelled to Moscow for a state visit, making history as the first Malaysian head of state to undertake a state visit to the Russian Federation since diplomatic relations were established in 1967.

His Majesty also graciously visited Kazan in the Republic of Tatarstan last year as part of efforts to strengthen friendship and cooperation between the two countries.

Beyond governance, His Majesty has a passion for vintage and modern cars and motorcycles, many of which are housed in his palace garages.

One of his notable achievements is the unique Istana Flintstones in Mersing – a 24ha palace inspired by the classic animated series, complete with a nine-storey lighthouse overlooking the sea.

The palace has since become a tourist attraction in the coastal town.

The Ruler's bond with his people is further strengthened through the Kembara Mahkota Johor, a royal expedition initiated in 2001 aimed at fostering closer ties between the royal family and the public.

Although the programme has been on hold since 2020 due to the pandemic, it remains a signature initiative close to His Majesty's heart.

The Ruler's passion for sports, especially polo, is also well documented.

In his younger years, His Majesty participated in matches not only in Malaysia but also in

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The King maintains a healthy lifestyle by incorporating horse riding into his fitness routine at Istana Pasir Pelangi in Johor Baru. — Photos from Sultan Ibrahim's official Facebook page

Sultan Ibrahim granting an audience to (from left) Johor Land and Mines director Mohammed Shakib Ali, Mersing District Council president Norman Noh, Mersing district officer Jamil Hasni Abdullah and former Johor State Secretary Datuk Asman Shah Abd Rahman at Istana Pasir Pelangi in Johor Baru. His Majesty expressed concern over environmental issues involving islands in Mersing.

His Majesty touring the Tanjung Penyabong Jetty in Mersing earlier this month, emphasising that cleanliness and environmental upkeep should always remain a top priority for local authorities.

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Sultan Ibrahim celebrating his birthday with his family members at Istana Pasir Pelangi in Johor Baru last year. — Photos from Sultan Ibrahim's official Facebook page

A wise and accomplished King

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Singapore, Brunei and the Philippines.

His Majesty earned the distinction of being the best polo player in Asia during the Polo World Qualifiers in the 1990s.

Sultan Ibrahim also enjoys parasailing, boating (jet ski), parachuting, shooting and driving sports cars.

His Majesty once won a falling plates shooting event organised by the army at the Malaysian Army Combat Training Centre (Pulada) in Johor.

According to Abdul Rahim, His Majesty parachuted out of a plane 19 times during his American Special Forces training, which earned him a Green Beret and wings.

"Very few leaders have undergone such training," he said, adding that Johor Regent Tunku Ismail Sultan Ibrahim has done nine such jumps as part of his own training.

Sultan Ibrahim, who is the third of 10 children and the eldest son, was born at Sultanah Aminah Hospital in Johor Baru on Nov 22, 1958.

His Majesty received his formal education at Sekolah Temenggong Abdul Rahman (1) before moving on to Trinity Grammar School in Australia and later to the United States to further his studies in law and diplomacy.

Sultan Ibrahim also obtained his religious education from Sekolah Agama Air Molek in Johor Baru.

After completing his secondary education, the King underwent basic military training at Pusat Latihan Darat in Kota Tinggi, Johor, for three months.

The King also underwent military training in the United States – first at Fort Benning, Georgia, and later at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Upon completion, Sultan Ibrahim was appointed deputy commander of the Johor Military Force.

Sultan Ibrahim has trained and served in both the Air Force and the Navy and is a qualified Green Beret commando in both Malaysia and the United States.

The Ruler is also a US Navy SEAL, an honorary member of Indonesia's Kopassus Red Berets and a fully certified divemaster.

As part of his preparations for kingship, Sultan Ibrahim joined the Johor Civil Service and served in various departments, including the district office, as well as the land, health and treasury departments.

In 1981, Sultan Ibrahim was proclaimed the Tunku Mahkota of Johor.

His Majesty is married to Raja Zarith Sofiah, a Perak princess and Oxford University graduate, who also serves as the Chancellor of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

The couple is blessed with six children – Tunku Ismail, Tunku Aminah Maimunah Iskandariah, Tunku Idris Iskandar Ismail Abdul Rahman, the late Tunku Abdul Jalil Iskandar Ibrahim Ismail, Tunku Abdul Rahman Hassanal Jeffri and Tunku Abu Bakar Mahmood Iskandar Ibrahim.

Their Majesties arriving for an investiture ceremony to confer federal awards, medals and honours in conjunction with Federal Territories Day at Istana Negara in February.

(From top) The King arriving for the opening ceremony of the Fifth Session of the 15th Parliament in Kuala Lumpur in January this year; Their Majesties spending time with their children and grandchildren over breakfast last July; and Raja Zarith Sofiah gracing the Bangsa Johor Bahagia 2.0 Project at Flat Hijau, Taman Plentong Utama, Johor Baru, in August last year.

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Group Managing Director

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(From left) Raja Zarith Sofiah meeting delegates at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies in the UK on Dec 11, 2025; delivering her Chancellor's address at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia's 69th graduation ceremony in Skudai on Nov 15, 2025; and offering words of encouragement to Tunku Putera Johor Tunku Abu Bakar Sultan Ibrahim as he geared up to take on the track at Japan's iconic Fuji International Speedway in July last year. — Photos from Sultan Ibrahim's official Facebook page

Championing education and lasting sustainability

(Above) Her Majesty engaging with exhibitors before launching the Johor Green Development Policy 2030 at the Tunku Mahkota Ismail Youth Centre in Johor Baru on Nov 24, 2025.

(Left) Raja Zarith Sofiah greeting members of the public during Universiti Teknologi Malaysia's 69th convocation ceremony in Skudai on Nov 15, 2025. — Photos from Sultan Ibrahim's official Facebook page

By YEE XIANG YUN
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THOUGH she now serves as the Queen of Malaysia, Johor remains close to the heart of Her Majesty Raja Zarith Sofiah, who continues to be involved in initiatives that reflect a deep interest in the state's progress.

As the wife of His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia, Raja Zarith Sofiah remains actively engaged in efforts to strengthen the state civil service and champion sustainability and education, nurturing talent, knowledge and responsible leadership in Johor.

Among these efforts was an initiative to enhance the capabilities of the Johor Civil Service (JCS).

During a visit to the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies in the United Kingdom on Dec 11 last year, Her Majesty proposed opportunities for collaboration to create a special programme for JCS officers. The proposed cooperation seeks to train and produce more dynamic and capable civil servants in delivering services to the public.

"History shows that many aspects of our administrative system were adapted from the United Kingdom.

"The collaborative programme will increase knowledge about government decision-making practices, such as those in Whitehall, which is the centre of the British government's administration," Her Majesty said in a post on Sultan Ibrahim's official Facebook page following the visit.

Her Majesty added that such exposure would help JCS officers design and deliver better public services for the people.

Raja Zarith Sofiah also proposed the participation of Johor religious administrative officers in the programme alongside their JCS counterparts, noting that the centre emphasises the application of Islamic knowledge across disciplines including economics, international development and history.

The Queen's engagement in Johor's development also extends to sustainability initiatives.

She launched the Johor Green Development Policy 2030 on Nov 24 last year. The event also marked the opening of the Raja Zarith Sofiah Learning Centre and the Johor Sustainability Centre.

According to Johor Sustainability Centre executive chairman Hasni Mohammad, the policy launch highlighted Her Majesty's long-standing advocacy for stronger climate action.

He noted that Raja Zarith Sofiah had previously stressed Malaysia's "prime duty" to address environmental threats in a keynote address at the University of Oxford in 2024.

"Her Majesty decreed that climate change and environmental degradation posed severe risks to livelihoods and infrastructure, particularly in rural and low-income communities," he said.

The Raja Zarith Sofiah Learning Centre, located in Taman Plentong Utama in Masai, was built using low-carbon technology and has achieved the highest S-Rank under Japan's Comprehensive Assessment System for Built Environment Efficiency green building assessment.

Education is another area close to Her Majesty's heart.

As the chancellor of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Raja Zarith Sofiah has often emphasised the importance of knowledge being accompanied by strong character.

At the university's 69th convocation ceremony in Skudai on Nov 15 last year, Her Majesty said: "In an era of rapidly advancing technology and artificial intelligence, we must ensure that progress in knowledge is matched by progress in character."

Her Majesty added that the younger generation must not only be equipped with knowledge and skills but also nurtured with noble values.

"Those of us who are older carry the responsibility of guiding this young generation.

"Therefore, we must possess both knowledge and good conduct so that we can serve as examples and provide guidance to our youth and children," Her Majesty added.

Beyond education and policy initiatives, Raja Zarith Sofiah also supports Johor's sporting efforts.

On April 7 last year, Her Majesty launched the new race machinery for Johor Motorsports Racing at the Permaisuri Zarith Sofiah Opera House in Johor Baru.

The event introduced the Corvette Z06 GT3.R race car, which was used by Johor's racing team in the following season.

The driver line-up comprised Tunku Panglima Johor Tunku Abdul Rahman Sultan Ibrahim, Tunku Putera Johor Tunku Abu Bakar Sultan Ibrahim and co-drivers Britain's Alexander Sims and Jordan Love from Australia.

Sultan Ibrahim and Raja Zarith Sofiah have shown their unwavering support for their sons' racing ventures, notably by attending races such as the GT World Challenge opener at the Sepang International Circuit on April 13 last year.

The Queen also graced the GT World Challenge Asia race at the Fuji Speedway Circuit in Japan in support of the royal siblings.

From strengthening governance and advocating environmental stewardship to promoting education, Raja Zarith Sofiah's initiatives reflect her enduring commitment to Johor.

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Sultan's vision uplifts the needy

BY NELSON BENJAMIN
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MORE than a million people across Johor have received help through the Sultan Ibrahim Johor Foundation, with each number representing a life eased, a burden lifted or a second chance given.

From patients in need of urgent care to families who have lost their homes to disasters, the foundation has quietly become a lifeline for many in the state.

The foundation has also distributed thousands of smart television sets as teaching aids to schools, medical equipment to government hospitals and built hundreds of homes for the B40 under its Rumah Impian Bangsa Johor programme.

For the foundation's managing trustee Datuk Avinderjit Singh, the impact goes far beyond statistics.

"Every event is memorable. When you look at the faces of the people we help, you understand what they are going through," he said.

According to Avinderjit, the foundation was established on July 14, 2016, as a realisation of the vision of His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia, to provide dedicated assistance to the needy and less fortunate.

"During his younger days and the Kembara Mahkota, Sultan Ibrahim travelled extensively across Johor, witnessing the struggles faced by ordinary rakyat.

"His Majesty saw it for himself and wanted to do something for them," Avinderjit said.

Besides the Sultan Ibrahim Johor Foundation, there are four other foundations set up by the Johor Royal Family, namely the Raja Zarith Sofiah of Johor Foundation, Sultanah Rogayah Foundation, Sultanah Fatimah Foundation and Tunku Laksamana Johor Cancer Foundation.

Avinderjit, who has been with the Sultan Ibrahim Johor Foundation since 2018, said its core team comprises six staff members as its secretariat and is headed by chief executive officer Mohd Anizam Jamian.

"During events or programmes, we get good support from Southern Volunteers and members of the Johor Military Force (JMF).

"Despite the size of our team, we've been able to help a large number of people," he said, adding that they have been successful thanks to strong support from stakeholders including Johor Civil Service (JCS) officers.

Avinderjit explained that besides himself, others in the foundation include Johor State Secretary Datuk Mohammed Ridha Abd Kadir, state legal adviser Datuk Abd Aziz Engan, state financial officer Datuk Mohd Noorazam Osman and Johor Corporation (JCorp) president and chief executive Datuk Syed Mohamed Syed Ibrahim.

Johor Mentri Besar Datuk Onn Hafiz Ghazi serves as the chairman of the foundation.

The foundation's work spans a wide range of areas, from building homes and providing medical assistance to offering student aid, home deposits for B40 households and emergency relief, said Avinderjit.

He also said that during festive seasons, aid is distributed across all communities, ensuring inclusivity and shared support.

"Each month, the foundation provides food baskets to at least 3,000 households state wide regardless of race," he said, adding that each basket has basic necessities including rice, sugar, cooking oil, biscuits, milk, coffee and tea.

The foundation also played a major role in distributing aid during the Covid-19 pandemic between 2019 and 2022.

"The pandemic disrupted lives across the country. It was a very difficult period.

"People couldn't work, there were shortages everywhere and we had to act," Avinderjit recalled.

He added that during that period, they spent about RM172mil on food aid, medical supplies and even essential equipment for hospitals such as ventilators.

"There was no choice. People needed help," he said, adding that at the heart of the foundation is the personal involvement of Sultan Ibrahim, whose compassion drives its mission.

"His Majesty doesn't like to see people suffering," Avinderjit said, adding that Sultan Ibrahim feels for his people, especially children and the elderly.

He added that whenever floods occur in the state, the Sultan is often present on the ground, offering reassurance to affected families.

"He tells them not to worry, that everything will be okay," he said, adding that sometimes it is the smallest gestures that matter most.

Avinderjit said Sultan Ibrahim also ensures that children at flood relief centres have activities, such as toys and colouring sets, to keep them occupied.

When asked how the foundation identifies its recipients, he said that many seek help through letters, sharing their struggles and hopes.

"Each case is carefully verified before assistance is given. We usually ask the district officer or the village heads to go and find out about people.

"We make sure the help goes to those who truly need it," Avinderjit said, adding that it is an honour for him to serve in the foundation.

He added that in most cases, the aid is provided as soon as possible.

"We also get requests from people from outside Johor. We examine the cases one by one, but our focus is mainly on Bangsa Johor," he said, adding that their greatest reward comes from thank you notes and messages on social media from those who have received aid.

"There is still a lot to be done," Avinderjit said, adding that the foundation gets its funding primarily from Sultan Ibrahim and corporate companies.

Asked about his relationship with Sultan Ibrahim, he said he has known the Ruler for more than 30 years.

"In conjunction with Sultan Ibrahim's official birthday today, I wish His Majesty good health and happiness always," he added.

Datuk Avinderjit (left) talking to The Star's senior news editor Nelson Benjamin about the roles and functions of the Sultan Ibrahim Johor Foundation. — THOMAS YONG/The Star

> Every event is memorable. When you look at the faces of the people we help, you understand what they are going through.
>
> DATUK AVINDERJIT SINGH

1. Sultan Ibrahim visiting flood victims at a relief centre in Kota Tinggi to provide aid through the Sultan Ibrahim Johor Foundation (SIJF).
2. Sultan Ibrahim inspecting tents donated to the Johor State Disaster Management Committee for disaster victims across Johor via the SIJF.
3. Datuk Avinderjit spending time with patients undergoing treatment at Hospital Sultanah Aminah. (First three photos are from Sultan Ibrahim's official Facebook page)
4. Sultan Ibrahim Johor Foundation chief executive officer Mohd Anizam Jamian (third from right) together with his team who help run the foundation. Looking on from left are finance manager Nurairin Naziah Alias, human resources manager and administration Nabila Suhada Mohd Yahya, senior manager Shah Reza Md Kanafe, Nor Afizan Mohd Jalil and Robiah Amir, both strategic unit and special duties managers.

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Lee (right) presenting a souvenir to French Ambassador to Malaysia Marc Abensour during his visit to the Invest Malaysia Facilitation Centre Johor on Feb 11. — Photo from Lee Ting Han's Facebook page

Lee (third from left) accompanying Onn Hafiz (second from right) who launched leading semiconductor and robotics company Brooks Automation's facility in Pasir Gudang on Jan 22. — Photo from Onn Hafiz Ghazi's Facebook page

New roadmap for Johor's growth

By YEE XIANG YUN
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THE blueprint and master plan for the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ), is expected to be unveiled soon, setting the policy framework that will shape Johor's industrial direction for the next five to 10 years.

Johor investment, trade, consumer affairs and human resources committee chairman Lee Ting Han said the long-anticipated blueprint is in its final stage and will provide a clearer roadmap for investors looking to expand in the state.

"The JS-SEZ will position Johor as a regional manufacturing and industrial extension base, opening up opportunities not only for manufacturers but also for logistics firms, technology companies and service providers," he said in an interview.

"At the same time, we are mindful that some local businesses are concerned about whether a large influx of foreign investment could sideline them.

"The state government takes these concerns seriously, and Mentri Besar Datuk Onn Hafiz Ghazi has made it clear that while attracting investment is important, local companies must also be part of the growth story."

He added that efforts are being made to ensure local firms benefit through supply chain partnerships, technology transfer and capacity building for small and medium enterprises.

"Over the past year, we have introduced various matching platforms, skills training programmes and industry engagement sessions to ensure that local businesses are not merely observers, but also participants and beneficiaries," he said.

The JS-SEZ is a strategic cooperation initiative between Malaysia and Singapore aimed at strengthening economic integration, attracting new investment and stimulating economic growth in Malaysia's southern region.

Among the aims of the JS-SEZ is to transform Johor's economic landscape, achieve a gross domestic product of RM260bil by 2030 and create 20,000 high-skilled jobs.

Among the aims of the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone is to transform Johor's economic landscape, achieve a gross domestic product of RM260bil by 2030 and create 20,000 high-skilled jobs. — Photo from Lee Ting Han's Facebook page

The blueprint and master plan unveiling follows in the wake of Johor's record-breaking achievement.

Lee said Johor secured RM110bil in approved investments in 2025, accounting for 25.77% of the country's total investment approvals last year.

The figure surpassed other major investment destinations such as Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Kedah.

"This is not only the highest investment in Johor's history but also the highest ever recorded by any state in Malaysia. It reflects Johor's growing role as a key driver of national investment growth," he said.

Lee said Johor's strong performance was supported by sectors such as advanced manufacturing, data centres, logistics, green energy and cross-border economic integration.

He noted that global economic shifts, including supply chain realignments, rapid digitalisation and the transition towards greener energy sources, have also worked in Johor's favour.

"Johor's development strategy aligns with national initiatives such as the New Industrial Master Plan 2030, the National Semiconductor Strategy and the National Energy Transition Roadmap.

"At the state level, these efforts are coordinated through the Maju Johor agenda and the Johor Economic Transformation Programme," he said.

Lee added that the state government has also adopted a proactive approach to facilitate investments.

He said the Mentri Besar personally chairs monthly investment coordination meetings involving state and federal agencies as well as utility providers to ensure faster approvals, better coordination and quicker resolution of issues faced by investors.

The investments approved in Johor in 2025 are expected to create 24,584 new jobs, strengthening the state's economic base and providing more opportunities for locals, he said.

Lee said the growth of sectors such as data centres has also created opportunities for local companies to participate in supporting industries.

"For example, data centre development requires electrical engineering, cooling systems, network services and even green energy solutions. These are all areas where local businesses can take part in the supply chain," he said.

Looking ahead, Lee said Johor is positioning itself to capitalise on emerging global industries such as artificial intelligence (AI), digital infrastructure and green energy.

He noted that Johor has already attracted a significant number of data centre investments due to its proximity to Singapore, availability of land and power supply, and improving digital infrastructure.

"But our goal is not simply to host servers.

"The real opportunity lies in building an ecosystem around AI applications, semiconductor and electronics manufacturing upgrades, digital services and high-skilled employment," he said.

Lee also pointed out that sustainability is becoming an increasingly important factor for multinational corporations when choosing investment locations.

"Green energy is no longer just an environmental issue. It is an industrial competitiveness issue.

"Many multinational companies now evaluate a location's energy mix, carbon emissions and sustainability capabilities when deciding where to invest," he said.

To meet this demand, Johor is pushing renewable energy development and industrial green solutions, including initiatives under the proposed Southern Johor Renewable Energy Corridor aimed at positioning the state as a regional clean energy hub.

At the same time, Lee said the state government is strengthening infrastructure and public utilities to support Johor's rapid economic growth such as improving water security, flood mitigation projects and enhancing connectivity.

He noted that one of the most significant projects is the Rapid Transit System Link, which is scheduled to begin operations on Jan 1, 2027.

"The rail system will transform cross-border movement between Johor and Singapore, strengthening business integration, workforce mobility and supply chain connectivity," he said.

Lee said Johor is aiming to sustain its investment growth in 2026 by focusing on sectors that will define the next economic cycle, including AI, advanced manufacturing, energy transition industries and knowledge-intensive services.

"These sectors will drive the next phase of Johor's economic development.

"Our goal is not just to increase investment figures but to create high-quality jobs, strengthen strategic industries and ensure long-term prosperity for the people of Johor," he said.

Daulat Tuanku

Mengadap

KEBAWAH DULI YANG MAHA MULIA
SULTAN IBRAHIM
SULTAN YANG DIPERTUAN BAGI NEGERI DAN JAJAHAN TAKLUK JOHOR DARUL TA'ZIM
YANG DI-PERTUAN AGONG

Merafak Sembah
Ucapan Setinggi-Tinggi Tahniah

Sempena
Sambutan Ulang Tahun Hari Keputeraan Rasmi
Sultan Johor

Pada 23 Mac 2026 Bersamaan 3 Syawal 1447 Hijrah

Dengan Segala Hormat Takzimnya
Yang Berdatang Sembah

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Prioritising community welfare

By VENESA DEVI
venesa@thestar.com.my

FROM cancer patients struggling to afford treatment to families rebuilding after tragedy, five Johor royal foundations have become a lifeline for those in need.

For those receiving aid from the five foundations, namely the Tunku Laksamana Johor Cancer Foundation (TLJCF), Sultan Ibrahim Johor Foundation (YSIJ), Sultanah Rogayah Foundation (YSR), Sultanah Fatimah Foundation (YSF) and Raja Zarith Sofiah of Johor Foundation (YRZSJ), the assistance has not only eased their financial burden but also given them strength to carry on with their daily lives.

Bone cancer warrior

Cancer patient D. Rajaletchumy, 57, said her fate changed when she became one of the beneficiaries of the TLJCF in January this year.

"No words can describe how grateful I am for the much-needed assistance from the foundation.

"I am unsure how long they can continue to subsidise me with my medication but for now, it has made a huge difference in my life," said the single mother.

Rajaletchumy, who was diagnosed with bone cancer in 2019, said her two sons, now aged 23 and 25, have taken up jobs to support her.

"I was diagnosed with stage two bone cancer in 2019, but I continued working as I was the sole breadwinner, and my children were still studying at the time.

"However, my body reached its limits in 2024 when I collapsed and was admitted to hospital for about two weeks," she said, adding that she later quit her job as a recovery officer.

Rajaletchumy, whose cancer has now reached stage four, said that despite the challenges, she is very grateful for the support she has received over the years.

Her Majesty Raja Zarith Sofiah, Queen of Malaysia, greeting Rajaletchumy at the Tunku Laksamana Johor Cancer Foundation's Sedekad Prihatin event last December. – Photo from the Tunku Laksamana Johor Cancer Foundation Facebook page

Continuous support

For M. Nalini, 34, receiving aid from YSR helped restore her faith in humanity as she coped with her now two-year-old daughter's life-threatening health condition.

"My daughter was only three months old when we found out about her heart problems, and we were later told that she had to undergo surgery.

"Desperate to find ways to fund the surgery, we asked for assistance from some non-governmental organisations but ended up being taken advantage of by one of them, who used our case to get donations without extending any assistance to us.

"We then had to use our savings and borrow money from family members to pay for the RM10,000 surgery in 2024.

"The experience made us wary about asking for help until we found out about YSR, a foundation that truly helped us get through it all," she said.

The mother of three said YSR had helped subsidise about RM5,000 in medical bills for her daughter L. Kaaviya Sri, who is expected to undergo another surgery in the next few months.

"I really appreciate the financial aid which lifted a heavy financial burden for us, but what I appreciate even more is the support the foundation has given us through difficult times.

"It does not feel like a one-off aid, as people from the foundation continue to reach out to us from time to time to find out how things are going.

"They even came bearing gifts in the form of basic aid for Deepavali," she said.

From flames to rebuilding

Suzana Zainal Abidin, 50, said she will be forever grateful to YSIJ, which had helped her rebuild the home she had lost in a fire in August 2025.

"I was at work when I received a call about the fire. I rushed back, but it was too late as everything had turned into ashes by the time I reached my house.

"It was a devastating sight. The deep sadness I felt at that time was beyond words, and all I could do was allow my tears to flow," said the single mother.

Just a few days after the tragedy, Suzana learnt that YSIJ had agreed to assist her and her neighbour, who also lost his home in the fire at Kampung Wak Salam in Mersing.

"I was extremely happy to receive the news. I did not expect this at all, as we had not even applied for any assistance at that point," she said.

"About three months later, the house was ready.

"We were once again pleasantly surprised when we saw that the three-bedroom home was already equipped with furniture and electrical appliances such as a refrigerator and a television," she said.

The mother of two said she was very grateful to YSIJ for their support, especially as the house meant so much to her family.

Johor Regent Tunku Mahkota Ismail presenting a mock key to Suzana for her new home. Also present are Sultan Ibrahim Johor Foundation managing trustee Datuk Avinderjit Singh (right) and Mersing district officer Jamil Hasni Abdullah. — Photo from Sultan Ibrahim's official Facebook page

Help in times of grief

Tan Hooi Fen, the principal of SJK(C) Pei Hwa in Taman Perling, Johor Baru, said she was grateful to YSF for channelling cash assistance to five pupils who lost their fathers.

"It is particularly heartbreaking that within just three months, all five students lost their fathers due to heart disease or road accidents.

"I reached out to YSF and they kindly agreed to provide financial aid," she said, adding that four of the children will now be raised by single mothers and one will be under the care of his grandfather.

She said that on Jan 22, YSF handed over RM3,000 to each of the five pupils.

"YSF director Datuk Ng Chong Boon also personally contributed RM2,000 to each family.

"We are deeply grateful to the foundation for always supporting families in need and for providing hope and encouragement during such difficult times," Tan said.

Respite after floods

Also receiving assistance from YSIJ was 73-year-old Hassan Ahmad, whose house in Parit Ulong, Batu Pahat, was affected by floods last year.

"I was pleasantly surprised when the village chief told me the foundation wanted to help me repair my house, which was badly damaged in the floods.

"It was really unexpected since I have never applied for any assistance," he said, adding that he was very grateful for YSIJ's concern.

The father of six and grandfather of 10 said the aid allows him and his family to live more comfortably.

"I live in the house with my wife and my third child, who is also my only son. My five daughters are all married and living with their respective families.

"They visit from time to time and at least now when they are here, they also get to stay in a more comfortable house," he said.

Pursuing her interest

For 18-year-old Chuah Yee Jia, the RM3,000 aid she received from YRZSJ under the Johor Stars Go Global programme in 2024 was a strong motivation for her to pursue her interest in science.

"Thanks to the aid, I was able to take part in a competition at the International Science and Engineering Fair in the United States.

"I am very grateful to the foundation as the aid they gave not only helped me financially but also boosted my confidence, knowing that such a prestigious organisation had so much faith in me," she said.

Chuah, who was then the only participant from Johor, secured fourth place in the chemistry category that year.

"I took part in the same competition the next year and competed in the cellular and molecular biology category, thanks to the confidence that I gained from YRZSJ's support," she added.

Home is where the heart is

Driving instructor Esmond Ng Kia Hern, 28, expressed his gratitude to YSF for helping his family rebuild their home in Muar, which was engulfed in flames during Chinese New Year last year.

"Not only did we lose the house, which had been in our family for three generations, but we also lost a van, a car and a motorcycle.

"No one was home at that time as we were visiting family and friends for Chinese New Year.

"By the time we reached home, everything was destroyed," he said, adding that he lived in the house with his parents and two siblings.

However, the eldest of three children said he was also grateful that nobody in his family, especially his elderly parents, were harmed.

"I asked around for assistance to rebuild the house and was connected to YSF, who agreed to help us.

"We were so relieved when we heard the news and will forever be grateful to the foundation for allowing us to get back the home that meant so much to our family," Ng added.

YSF chairman Mejar Cina Datuk David Wong Khong Soon (eighth from left) presenting a mock key to Ng (on Wong's left) for his family's new home. — Photo from Yayasan Sultanah Fatimah Facebook page

Daulat Tuanku

Mengadap

KEBAWAH DULI YANG MAHA MULIA SULTAN IBRAHIM

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(Clockwise from top left) Ling (right) speaking with staff members during a visit to Hospital Pasir Gudang; a view of the exterior of Hospital Sultanah Aminah in Johor Baru; and Hospital Pasir Gudang healthcare personnel wheeling beds into position in one of the wards. – Courtesy photos

Ensuring quality healthcare service

By YEE XIANG YUN
xiangyun@thestar.com.my

THE accelerated opening of Hospital Pasir Gudang has begun easing pressure on public healthcare services in Johor.

State health and environment committee chairman Ling Tian Soon said the Bandar Baru Seri Alam facility is now running at around 80% capacity, following earlier delays caused by staffing shortages.

"The hospital has already begun improving access to treatment for residents in Pasir Gudang and surrounding areas.

"The expedited operations of Hospital Pasir Gudang have brought relief to the local community," he said.

Originally slated to open last year, the hospital faced delays largely due to manpower shortages, a challenge that has since been gradually resolved to enable its phased operations.

The hospital will feature 14 specialist clinics and 304 beds when fully operational.

Ling said the state government remains focused on strengthening healthcare delivery across Johor, particularly in high-density areas where demand continues to rise.

Among the key measures taken are upgrades to overcrowded health clinics, including the Gelang Patah health clinic and Sultan Ismail health clinic, which have been grappling with high patient volumes due to limited and ageing facilities.

"To alleviate congestion, the state implemented decanting projects for both clinics, involving the relocation of maternal and child health services to new premises.

"The decanting projects for both facilities were carried out with an allocation of RM8.4mil. This allows us to reduce congestion and ensure smoother services for patients," he said.

He added that similar efforts are in the pipeline for the Majidee and Kulai health clinics as part of a broader plan to enhance healthcare facilities in densely populated areas.

Ling (centre, in dark blue shirt) during his visit to the upgraded Sultan Ismail health clinic in Taman Mount Austin, Johor Baru, which was converted from a long-abandoned market. – Courtesy photo

Ling also highlighted a recent milestone achieved by Hospital Sultanah Aminah, which retained its position among the top 50 hospitals in Malaysia for 2026, ranking 36th.

"This achievement reflects the dedication, strong commitment and continuous efforts of the entire hospital workforce in ensuring that the people of Johor receive the best healthcare services.

"The frontliners are the true heroes of Bangsa Johor and the state government will continue supporting the public healthcare system through a whole-of-government approach to ensure quality and dignified services for the people," he said.

Ling also noted that Johor's broader development agenda, guided by Johor Regent Tunku Ismail Sultan Ibrahim, places strong emphasis on ensuring that economic growth translates into tangible benefits for the rakyat, particularly in healthcare.

The state government has taken immediate steps to ensure that healthcare infrastructure keeps pace with development, particularly in addressing overcrowding and improving patient comfort, Ling added.

He also recalled his early days in office, describing the mandate to strengthen Johor's healthcare system as both a responsibility and a trust.

"I clearly remember March 26, 2022, when I was sworn in and entrusted with the health portfolio.

"At that time, the Regent emphasised the need for Johor to have a truly high-quality healthcare system and facilities for the benefit of Bangsa Johor.

"That mandate was not just a responsibility, but a great trust concerning the future of the people. From that moment, I saw how far-sighted the Regent was in strengthening service quality and ensuring that the well-being of the rakyat remains a priority," he added.

Ling said Tunku Ismail has consistently stressed that every development plan must have a real and direct impact on the people, while also upholding unity across communities regardless of background.

Beyond healthcare, Ling said environmental stewardship remains a key pillar of the state's development approach, in line with the Regent's emphasis on sustainability.

He said enforcement against illegal dumping and littering would be strengthened, including the use of community service orders as a form of corrective and educational punishment.

Johor, he noted, is the first state in the country to implement community service sentences for littering offences.

"This shows that our development is not solely focused on economic growth, but also on the well-being of the people through better healthcare services and a clean, sustainable environment," he said.

Ling added that the state government remains committed to ensuring that all incoming investments translate into meaningful improvements in infrastructure, public services and overall quality of life.

"Differences in views are normal in any society, but they should not lead to division.

"Johor's strength lies in the close relationship between the palace, the state leadership and the people, united under the identity of Bangsa Johor," he noted.

He said efforts to enhance healthcare services and facilities will continue as part of the state's long-term development plans.

"There is much more to be done, especially in strengthening and upgrading the healthcare system and services for the people.

"Let us continue to uphold the spirit of unity, mutual respect and togetherness in building a more advanced, prosperous and harmonious Johor," he added.

Daulat Tuanku

Mengadap

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Happy Birthday, Your Majesty!

Hearts across Johor are filled with gratitude as Johoreans extend warm birthday wishes to their cherished Ruler, His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar, who also serves as the King of Malaysia.

"Wishing His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia, a long and prosperous life. May His Majesty continue to lead Malaysia to greater heights and make us Johoreans proud."

Wai Kit Siew, 35
Civil servant, Batu Pahat

"Happy birthday to our beloved Ruler, His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia. May His Majesty continue to be blessed with good health and happiness."

Nur Qamarina Roslan, 27
Freelancer, Muar

"I would like to humbly extend my heartfelt congratulations to His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia, on the occasion of his birthday. May Sultan Ibrahim always be blessed with good health and wisdom to protect and guide the people. Long live His Majesty!"

Mohd Shameer Fahmi Nurulfuad, 37
Ambulance driver, Kota Tinggi

"We, the people of Johor, would like to wish His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia, a happy birthday. Thank you for all that you do for Johor and the country."

Dr A. Avinesh, 40
Medical doctor, Johor Baru

"Happy birthday to our beloved Ruler, His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia! Thank you for being a caring leader who always puts the people first. We are proud to be Bangsa Johor and even prouder to have you as our Sultan and our King. Whenever Your Majesty passes through, Tangkak is always ready with a warm welcome and a smile. We hope to see you here soon. Daulat Tuanku!"

Zacky Khairudean Mohd Khalid, 46
Teacher, Tangkak

"May His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia, always be granted good health, happiness and many more years ahead. Daulat Tuanku!"

S. Seethalatchmi, 54
Public cleansing worker, Pontian

"I humbly extend my deepest congratulations to His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia. May His Majesty and the royal family enjoy continued happiness and well-being."

Lee Tet Long, 67
Building contractor, Kulai

"I would like to extend my warmest wishes to His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia. May His Majesty be blessed with good health, happiness and continued strength in leading and serving the people of Johor and Malaysia. I'm proud to be a Johorean. Daulat Tuanku!"

Tien Hwei Ki, 33
Senior human resource analyst, Segamat

"Wishing His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia, a most joyous and blessed birthday. May His Majesty always be endowed with wisdom, strength and good health to guide the nation with grace and compassion. Daulat Tuanku!"

R. Kogilavani, 42
Trader, Kluang

"On behalf of the people of Mersing, I extend our heartfelt birthday wishes to His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia. May His Majesty's reign always be blessed with prosperity, harmony and unity for all Malaysians."

Azhar Zainal Abidin, 40
Managing director, Mersing

Daulat Tuanku

Mengadap

KEBAWAH DULI YANG MAHA MULIA SULTAN IBRAHIM

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Daulat Tuanku

Mengadap

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Datuk Bandar
Ahli-Ahli Majlis dan seluruh Warga Kerja
Majlis Bandaraya Johor Bahru

Daulat Tuanku

Mengadap

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Stronger urban smart initiatives

By MYSARA FAUZI
newsdesk@thestar.com.my

A view of the Iskandar Puteri Command Centre (IPCC), where live CCTV feeds are monitored for traffic management. — Courtesy photo

AS the Greater Johor Baru area continues to expand, local authorities are turning to smart technology to improve urban management and public services.

The four local councils – Johor Baru City Council (MBJB), Iskandar Puteri City Council (MBIP), Pasir Gudang City Council (MBPG) and Kulai Municipal Council (MPKu) – are working together to strengthen smart city initiatives across the region.

Their collaboration focuses on integrating technologies such as the installation of smart closed-circuit television (CCTV) systems, intelligent traffic light systems and command centres to improve safety, mobility and service delivery for city dwellers.

The initiative also supports more efficient monitoring of city conditions, allowing local councils to respond faster to traffic congestion, security concerns and other urban challenges.

Johor Baru mayor Datuk Mohd Haffiz Ahmad said MBJB has installed 500 smart CCTV cameras across the city to enhance security monitoring and urban management.

"Another 2,000 units are expected to be installed this year.

"This is to further strengthen surveillance coverage in strategic locations, including major roads, public spaces and high-traffic areas," he said in an interview.

He said MBJB has also implemented smart traffic light systems to improve traffic flow and reduce congestion across the city.

"As of November last year, a total of 215 smart traffic light units have been installed at key intersections under the council's jurisdiction," he said.

He explained that the integration of smart CCTV systems and intelligent traffic lights allows the authorities to better monitor conditions on the ground while supporting the council's broader smart city framework.

In Iskandar Puteri, mayor Hasrin Kamal Hashim said the council has installed 500 smart CCTV units across its jurisdiction to strengthen urban surveillance and monitoring.

"Smart city development also involves data sharing, CCTV networks, AI-based smart traffic monitoring and digital twin systems, enabling faster and more accurate decision-making.

"MBIP also plans to install an additional 2,000 smart CCTV units in phases to further enhance security and city management capabilities," he said.

He emphasised dynamic traffic management by coordinating signal timings at major intersections according to current traffic flow patterns.

"All traffic lights under the council's jurisdiction are being upgraded to smart traffic lights across 179 intersections progressively until 2038, with a total contract cost of RM68mil.

"These smart traffic lights can be linked to the command centre for 24-hour centralised monitoring and control, enhancing urban traffic management efficiency," he added.

He said the command centre functions as an integrated urban monitoring and operations coordination hub that utilises smart technology and real-time data.

"Through the command centre, information collected from CCTV cameras, traffic lights and other monitoring systems can be analysed more efficiently to support city management," he added.

"This enables our local authorities to respond more quickly to traffic congestion, security incidents and other operational challenges affecting residents."

Hasrin said public transportation is also being enhanced through the Muafakat Johor bus network, which improves mobility connectivity across local council areas in the Greater Johor Baru region.

"This free bus service connects several local authority areas to central Johor Baru, facilitating daily commuting for residents.

"We are also developing smart bus shelters equipped with CCTV, air quality sensors and digital displays for real-time bus tracking.

"These facilities aim to increase safety and comfort for public transport users while supporting a more efficient and modern urban mobility system," he said.

Meanwhile, Pasir Gudang mayor Datin Paduka Hazlina Jalil said MBPG has taken a comprehensive approach to address traffic and urban mobility issues through city planning, smart technology and enforcement.

She said the smart traffic light and smart CCTV initiatives were introduced in 2023 and are now fully operational, allowing traffic conditions to be monitored in real time.

"The system utilises AI technology through CCTV cameras installed at traffic light intersections, which are directly connected to the command centre.

"Through the system, traffic flow can be monitored more efficiently, including the implementation of the green wave concept, where traffic lights are synchronised to facilitate smoother vehicle movement along major routes," she said.

"The technology is also capable of detecting vehicle licence plates and recording incidents such as accidents or traffic congestion more quickly and accurately."

She added that the project involved an allocation of RM79.6mil and has helped the council identify traffic congestion issues more efficiently, enabling quicker response from the relevant authorities.

She said the command centre functions as the main hub for collecting and managing city data involving various smart systems across Pasir Gudang.

"These include a smart traffic management system covering 33 signalised intersections, a network of 340 AI-enabled CCTV units, as well as panic buttons installed at strategic locations for public safety.

"Other smart city initiatives implemented by our council include 56 smart bins, the installation of 5,756 solar-powered smart streetlights units and 11 smart poles that support the city's urban monitoring system," she added.

Hazlina said the effort has also contributed to Pasir Gudang being recognised as a Level 1 Smart City (Early Adopter) under the Malaysia Smart City Rating and the council is now moving towards Level 2, which is Developing Smart City.

As for MPKu, president Mohd Hafiz Aliman said the implementation of a command centre is a key component in improving security, traffic monitoring and urban management to enhance residents' welfare.

"Under this initiative, 300 smart CCTV camera units are planned to be installed across the council's jurisdiction. From the total, 202 are already operational and the remaining installations to be completed progressively by next year.

"Each CCTV is strategically positioned at major intersections, public hotspots, educational institutions, recreational areas and high-risk routes to ensure comprehensive monitoring of safety and security.

"The system also assists authorities in monitoring traffic congestion, detecting accidents, supporting security investigations and expediting enforcement responses to incidents," he said.

He added that the smart CCTV system includes artificial intelligence (AI) technology capable of categorising alerts for more efficient urban monitoring.

He said the council has also installed smart traffic lights at 28 intersections within its jurisdiction to improve traffic management and reduce congestion.

At the same time, he said the smart traffic light system is integrated with the command and control centre to monitor unexpected traffic congestion and help streamline traffic flow.

"The increasing use of smart surveillance and intelligent traffic systems across the councils reflects the broader push towards creating more connected and responsive cities.

"By integrating these technologies through command centres, local authorities are able to monitor city conditions in real time and coordinate responses more effectively," he added.

"Smart city initiatives also support public safety through the deployment of automated external defibrillators (AED) at high-traffic spots such as schools, hospitals and bus terminals.

"AEDs can improve the chances of saving lives in cases of sudden cardiac arrest while awaiting professional medical assistance."

Mohd Haffiz: MBJB has implemented smart traffic light systems to improve traffic flow and reduce congestion citywide.

Hazlina: MBPG is addressing traffic and urban mobility issues through city planning, smart technology and enforcement.

Hasrin: MBIP has installed 500 smart CCTV units across its jurisdiction to strengthen urban surveillance and monitoring.

Mohd Hafiz: Having a command centre is essential in improving security, traffic monitoring and urban management.

Daulat Tuanku

Mengadap

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French far right stumbles in polls

Party fails to win major cities in municipal election, boosting mainstream rivals

PARIS: France's far-right National Rally (RN) failed to win control of any major city in the nationwide municipal election, a setback that gave hope to embattled mainstream parties ahead of next year's presidential election.

Marine Le Pen's nationalist eurosceptic party lost out in big target cities including Marseille and Toulon, although an ally, Eric Ciotti, who heads his own staunchly conservative UDR party, won in Nice, France's fifth-largest city.

The municipal votes on Sunday were a test of both the depth of the far right's support base a year ahead of presidential elections to replace centrist Emmanuel Macron, and the resilience of mainstream parties in a fragmented political landscape.

Opinion polls project both Le Pen and her young protege Jordan Bardella would perform strongly in the 2027 race.

Le Pen is awaiting a ruling in her appeal against an embezzlement conviction before deciding whether she will run for a fourth time. The 35,000 separate municipal ballots typically focus on local issues and their outcome does not offer a neat forecast of who will succeed Macron.

Victory in Toulon: The city's incumbent mayor with the electoral list 'Toulon mon parti' Josee Massi emerged victorious after France's 2026 municipal elections. In France, an electoral list refers to a pre-set group of candidates who run together as a single team to lead a city. — AFP

But they show trends in popularity and in the type of alliances that can be struck in an increasingly fragmented political landscape, and senior politicians from all parties were quick to claim Sunday's outcome was good news for them.

In Paris, Socialist Party candidate Emmanuel Gregoire fended off a challenge from conservative former minister Rachida Dati and ensured the French capital remains in left-wing hands.

With wins in Paris and Marseille, the Socialist Party, long weakened nationally, saw reasons for hope.

"Paris will be the heart of the resistance" to any union of the mainstream right and far-right, Socialist winner Gregoire said after he crossed Paris on a bicycle – a nod to the left's green policies in the French capital.

Senior politicians on the mainstream right said the municipal elections showed they needed to be united to win – especially in next year's presidential election.

Former prime minister Edouard Philippe was re-elected mayor in his port city of Le Havre, in a boost to his hopes of running for president in 2027.

Philippe, a centre-right politician who served as prime minister under Macron, said "there were reasons to be hopeful" in the values of France and that the extremes can be beaten.

In the second-biggest city Marseille, incumbent Socialist Mayor Benoit Payan was re-elected with 54% of the votes.

He had been neck-and-neck with the RN in the first round, and was boosted after his hard-left rival pulled out of the run-off to prevent a far-right victory.

"This city, which some believed lost, showed its most beautiful face, showed that it was capable of resisting," said Payan.

The Socialist Party said it had also beaten Francois Bayrou, a centre-right former prime minister of Macron, in the city of Pau.

The hard-left France Unbowed (LFI) won in the northern city of Roubaix and in the Saint-Denis suburb of Paris.

"Traditional parties are losing ground," Manuel Bompard, of LFI, said. — Reuters

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Memories that last a lifetime

> FROM PAGE 24

He added that the advice continues to guide him in running his cafe.

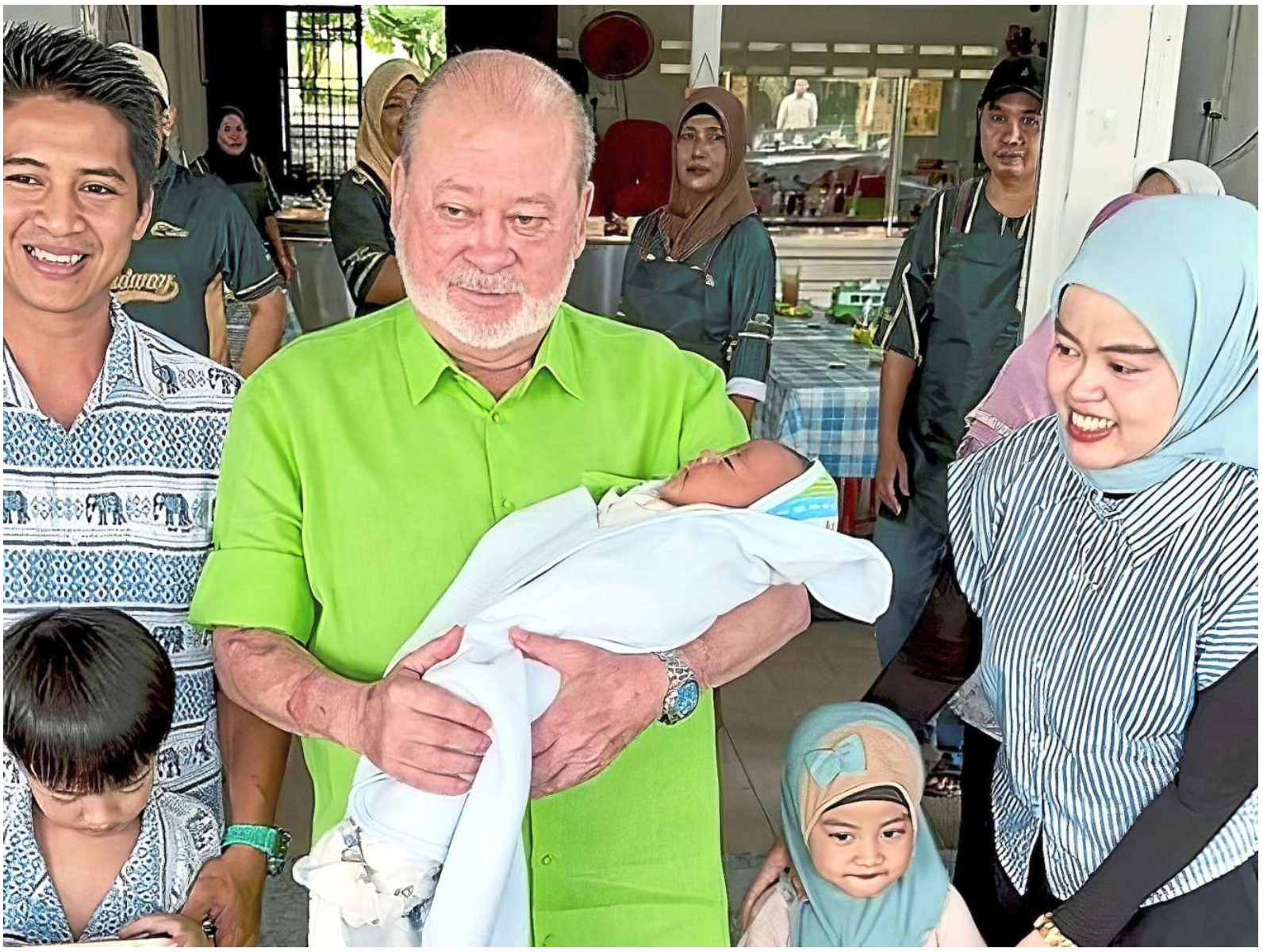
To Ghazali, the King's humility and warmth stand out the most, and he describes Sultan Ibrahim as a truly people-oriented Ruler.

For both Lee and Ghazali, these royal visits are more than just special moments of recognition; they are lasting memories that continue to inspire them in their daily lives and businesses.

On Aug 15 last year, Sultan Ibrahim warmly interacted with visitors during a stop at a restaurant at the Dusun Panti Rest and Service Area on the Kota Tinggi-Mersing Highway.

En route to Mersing for breakfast, His Majesty was greeted by the public and even posed for a photograph with a family who had recently celebrated the birth of a child.

His Majesty usually stops at the restaurant during each visit to Mersing and orders soto, a Johor delicacy, for breakfast.



Sultan Ibrahim posing for a group photo with a family who had recently welcomed a new baby during a stop at the Dusun Panti Rest and Service Area along the Kota Tinggi-Mersing Highway on Aug 15 last year.

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The Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception (left) and the Gurdwara Sahib are within walking distance of each other along Coronation Avenue in Johor Baru,

The street where many faiths meet

By VENESA DEVI
venesa@thestar.com.my

CORONATION Avenue in Johor Baru is one of the rare places in the country where a mosque, church, temple and gurdwara stand within walking distance of each other. The area spans several major roads, including Jalan Trus, Jalan Gereja, Jalan Tan Hiok Nee, Jalan Ungku Puan, Jalan Abdullah Ibrahim and Jalan Dhoby.

It is home to the city's iconic religious institutions such as the Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception, Johor Ancient Temple, Gurdwara Sahib, Arulmigu Rajamariamman Devasthanam Temple and Masjid India.

Their close proximity is not a coincidence, but the result of deliberate policies and developments dating back more than a century.

Johor Council of the Royal Court adviser Prof Datuk Kassim Thukiman said the unique arrangement of houses of worship in Johor Baru is closely linked to the concept of Bangsa Johor, which evolved as the state opened its doors to more communities.

He said Johor was initially dominated by Malays, but this began to change following the more liberal policies introduced by Temenggong Ibrahim and later continued by Sultan Sir Abu Bakar and Sultan Sir Ibrahim.

"These Rulers encouraged the entry of investors and foreign workers into Johor, which led to the growth of a more complex, multi-ethnic society," he said.

He said this transformation was closely tied to Johor's economic development in the 19th century, particularly through the kangchu system, which saw Chinese settlers cultivating gambier and black pepper.

"As early as 1844, Johor became known internationally as a major exporter of gambier and black pepper.

"At the same time, Europeans, especially the British, were involved in various economic activities, while the Indian community contributed to sectors such as infrastructure development, including roads and railways," he explained.

He said the Sikh community was also present, serving as part of the security forces linked to the British in Singapore and Johor.

"As these communities settled in Johor, they began to build their own lives, including places of worship. This was made possible because the Johor Sultanate allowed freedom of religion, even though Islam was the state religion," he said.

Prof Kassim noted that the Johor Constitution of 1895 affirms Islam as the state religion while allowing other communities to practise their faiths freely.

He said this balance enabled the development of various religious institutions across Johor Baru, often with the consent and support of the Rulers.

"For example, one of the earliest places of worship was a Chinese temple along Jalan Trus, built around 1870, which became a unifying symbol for different Chinese sub-ethnic groups.

"In 1883, Sultan Abu Bakar also granted land for the construction of a church to accommodate the Christian community, reflecting his close ties with the British and Europe," he added.

He said that before the construction of the Sultan Abu Bakar Mosque, which was completed in 1900, smaller mosques already existed in Johor Baru, including Masjid India and others in areas such as Kampung Pahang.

Prof Kassim said land was also granted to the Indian and Sikh communities, leading to the construction of temples and gurdwaras in the early 20th century.

"All this reflects the diversity of Johor's population and the Rulers' role in ensuring social harmony.

Masjid India (above) and Arulmigu Rajamariamman Devasthanam Temple (right) are among the houses of worship serving the local community.

"Although the Sultan is the head of Islam, the institution has also ensured that other communities are given the space to practise their religions," he said.

He said this approach has become a defining feature of Bangsa Johor, which emphasises unity, economic development, education and mutual understanding.

"There is a well-known principle in Johor – 'Muafakat itu berkat' – which highlights the importance of unity. This spirit of cooperation played a key role in the development of Johor and still shapes its identity today," he said.

Local community leader V. Raja Selan said the street's history dates back to the 19th century, when the late Sultan Sir Ibrahim began granting land to various religious communities.

"His Majesty wanted to ensure that all communities lived in harmony and made that possible by placing all the major religious institutions along the same street.

"That kind of thinking was rare at the time. The Sultan was very forward-thinking and knew harmony was important," he said.

Raja Selan, who is also the former president of the Arulmigu Rajamariamman Devasthanam, said the concept of cooperation has been preserved for generations.

"Whenever there is a festival or procession, we inform the other religious groups in advance. It has always been a mutual understanding.

"When people of different faiths are your neighbours, you learn to understand and respect each other," he said.

Johor Baru Tiong-Hua Association president Chee Wing Kien said the street is a good example of the strong spirit of unity among Malaysians.

"This street shows that unity is not something we just talk about.

"In many parts of the world, religious sites are separated by distance or conflict. Here, they have stood side by side for generations and that says a lot," he said.

Meanwhile, Malaysian Tourist Guides Council president Jimmy Leong said the area, commonly known as the Johor Baru central business district, has become increasingly popular.

"I've met people who have lived here for years but never realised just how much history and culture is packed into this small area," he said.

Leong, who is also Johor Tourist Guides Association chairman, said the street is not only a reflection of Johor's multiracial fabric, but also a reminder of the state's inclusive foundations.

In 2017, the Johor government introduced Persiaran Muafakat Bangsa Johor, recognising the area as the state's own "Street of Harmony" because of its concentration of religious institutions.

The area was later named Coronation Avenue in 2018.

Daulat Tuanku

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ISKANDAR PUTERI

Street names that honour local pioneers

By MOHD FARHAAN SHAH
farhaan@thestar.com.my

THOUSANDS of motorists pass through the streets of Johor Baru every day, yet many may not realise that the names on signboards around the city carry stories tied to its royal heritage and early pioneers.

The origins of many streets reflect the role of the Johor royal family and community leaders in shaping the state capital into what it is today.

Many of the roads in Johor Baru were first built during the reigns of Almarhum Sultan Sir Abu Bakar Ibni Temenggung Daeng Ibrahim and Almarhum Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Abu Bakar, who were credited with laying the foundations for the development of modern Johor.

The Johor Sultanate traditionally named streets after Rulers, community leaders and individuals who played important roles in developing the state and its capital.

These names serve not only as a tribute to their contributions but also as historical references for future generations.

Since 1862, street names in Johor have been written in Malay using both Roman and Jawi scripts on yellow signboards, symbolising royal consent and efforts to preserve Johor's Malay cultural identity.

One of the earliest roads built in Johor Baru was Jalan Tebrau, which connected the town to Kangkar Tebrau, an early Chinese settlement established in the mid-1840s.

The road played a key role in linking the developing town with agricultural areas where early Chinese settlers cultivated crops such as gambier and pepper.

Another early road in the city is Jalan Ibrahim, named after Temenggong Daeng Ibrahim who was officially appointed Dato' Temenggong Sri Maharaja Johor in 1841 and played a crucial role in Johor's administration and early development.

The road was already in existence by the late 19th century and remains one of the city's historic routes. Meanwhile, Persiaran Abu Bakar was named after Sultan Abu Bakar Ibni Temenggong Daeng Ibrahim, widely regarded as the Father of Modern Johor.

The road stretches from the intersection near Sultan Abu Bakar State Mosque to Sungai Chat and runs along the scenic coastline of the Johor Straits.

The road was constructed in 1897 following land reclamation along the Straits of Tebrau, extending from Sungai Chat to the front of the Johor Zoo.

Formerly known as Jalan Abu Bakar during the 1960s, the road was renamed Persiaran Abu Bakar in 2014 by the current Johor Ruler Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar.

Another road associated with Johor's royal lineage is Jalan Ismail Sultan, located along the coastline near Istana Besar Johor. The road is named after Sultan Ismail, the third Sultan of the modern Johor Sultanate.

In 2014, Sultan Ibrahim also renamed Jalan Bukit Meldrum to Jalan Ismail Sultan as a tribute to the former Ruler.

Another coastal road, Jalan Ibrahim Sultan, honours Sultan Ibrahim, the second Sultan of modern Johor. During his reign, Johor underwent major development, including railway expansion, the construction of the Causeway and the establishment of the state administrative centre at Bangunan Sultan Ibrahim.

Sultan Ibrahim also oversaw the development of modern hospitals and large agricultural estates that boosted Johor's economy. Sultan Ibrahim's long reign included two significant milestones: his Silver Jubilee in 1935 and his Diamond Jubilee on Sept 17, 1955.

Some roads in Johor Baru were also named after prominent political figures who shaped the state's governance.

Among them is Jalan Dato Onn, named after Datuk Onn Jaafar, the founding father of Umno.

He served as Johor's seventh Menteri Besar beginning Oct 1, 1946 and was also the son of Johor's first Menteri Besar, Jaafar Muhammad.

Beyond Malay leaders, Johor Baru's development was also shaped by members of the Chinese community who played major roles in trade and construction.

One of the most prominent figures was Wong Ah Fook.

The Chinese immigrant, entrepreneur and philanthropist left a lasting imprint on Johor, particularly through his work as a building contractor.

He was responsible for constructing several key buildings in Johor, including the original royal palace, Istana Besar Johor, in 1865.

His contributions earned him the trust of the Johor Sultanate and he later became the government's main contractor.

As recognition for his services, he was granted a 99-year lease for 10 plots of land on the eastern bank of Sungai Segget in 1892.

The area became known as Kampung Wong Ah Fook, and the main road through the settlement was named Jalan Wong Ah Fook.

Several smaller roads in the area were also named after his sons, including Jalan Siu Nam, Jalan Siu Koon and Jalan Siu Chin.

Another influential Chinese leader remembered in Johor Baru's street names is Tan Hiok Nee. Jalan Tan Hiok Nee honours the prominent community leader who once headed the Ngee Heng Kongsi.

The organisation helped finance the large-scale cultivation of gambier and black pepper – two of Johor's key commodities in the 19th century.

As a respected leader of the Chinese community, Tan also helped establish the Johor Ancient Chinese Temple on land granted by Sultan Abu Bakar along Jalan Trus.

In gratitude of the Sultan's support, the Chinese community later presented a Chinese Assembly Hall building to the Ruler.

Tan also became the first Johor Chinese to receive the title of Datuk from Sultan Abu Bakar.

He was later appointed as a member of the Johor State Council.

Johor Tourist Guides Association chairman Jimmy Leong said understanding the stories behind street names is essential for residents to appreciate the city's past.

"For me, everyone should know where they come from and how their communities were formed," he said.

Leong said history is one of the few things that never changes, and it is often preserved through landmarks and street names.

"If we do not make the effort to understand these stories, people will not realise the background behind the names they see every day," he said.

He noted that many landmarks and historical buildings in Johor Baru have either disappeared or been integrated into modern developments over the years.

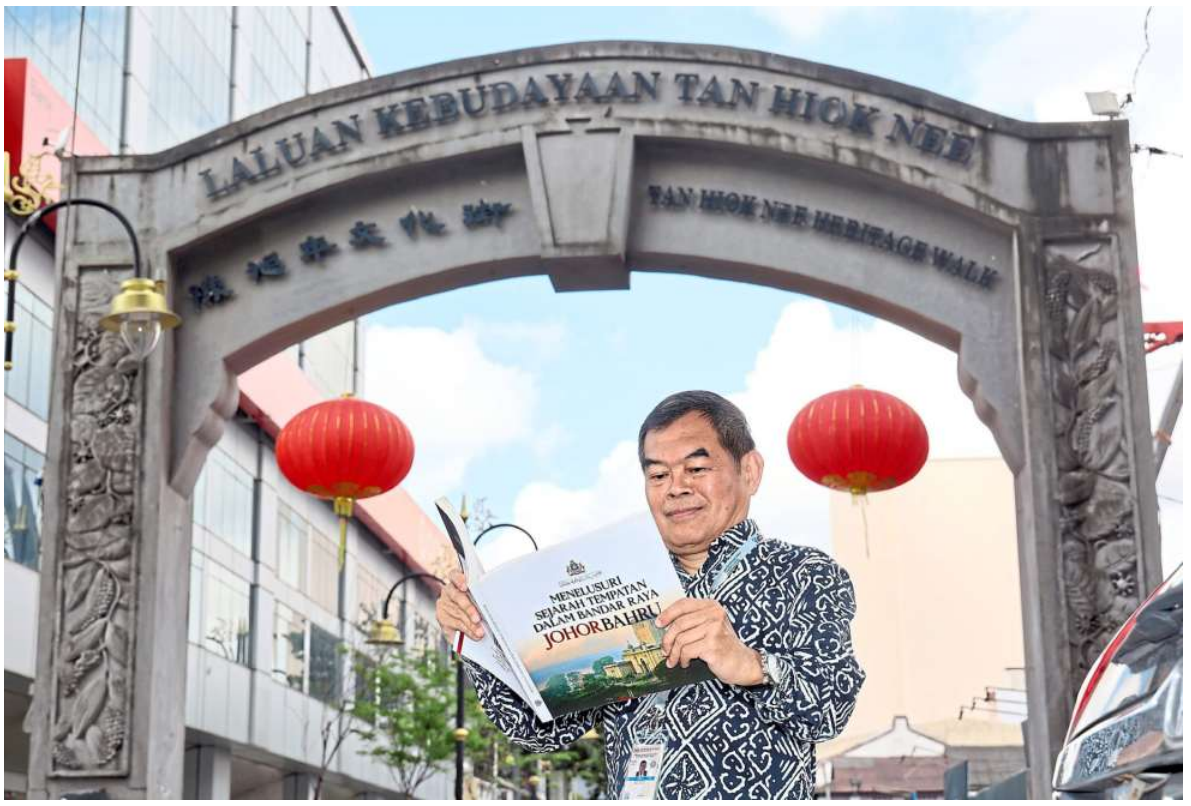
However, the stories connected to the streets remain important links to the city's past.

"Every street and landmark has a piece of history behind it," he said.

Leong added that street names traditionally came from two main sources – prominent individuals who contributed to the state and local traditions tied to particular places.

For Leong, such stories highlight how Johor Baru grew through the combined efforts of Rulers, migrants and entrepreneurs.

Preserving and sharing these historical narratives, he noted, will help ensure that the legacy behind Johor Baru's streets continues to be remembered by future generations.



Leong with a book on the origins of street names in Johor Baru, published by the Johor Baru City Council, at the entrance of Jalan Tan Hiok Nee. — THOMAS YONG/The Star

Jalan Wong Ah Fook is named after the prominent figure who helped develop Johor Baru during the reign of Sultan Abu Bakar. Nearby, Jalan Siu Koon honours one of Wong's three sons.

Jalan Segget, located in the heart of Johor Baru, is named after Sungai Segget – a river that took its name from a ship.

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Putting Johor on the batik map

By ZAZALI MUSA
metro@thestar.com.my

Muhammad Faris stamping patterns using a copper batik cap; and (right) Muhammad Danial showing batik fabric with a pineapple motif at a Batik House outlet at the Johor Craft Complex on Jalan Cenderasari in Larkin, Johor Baru. — Photo by ZAZALI MUSA

UNLIKE Kelantan and Terengganu, Johor is lesser known for its batik craftsmanship and textile production.

Batik making in the first two states can be traced back to the early 20th century, with significant production established between 1910 and 1913, particularly in Kota Bharu, Kelantan.

In contrast, the history of batik making in Johor is not mentioned in literature, books or other texts on traditional textile production in the country.

On that note, a Johor-based company aims to position the state as one of Malaysia's reputable batik making spots.

"It might take years or even decades before we see the results, but you have to start somewhere," said The Batik House manager Muhammad Faris Razak during an interview at the Johor Craft Complex in Jalan Cenderasari in Larkin, Johor Baru.

Muhammad Faris, 23, runs the batik production house at the complex, producing batik textiles featuring Johor motifs together with his 21-year-old brother, Muhammad Danial, under the brand name Imarazak.

The family-run business was asked to lead batik-making initiatives after it was noted that Johor lacks a distinct batik identity.

"We have been looking around and found that there were no batik-making activities in Johor, either as a cottage industry or commercial production," he said.

The Batik House was founded in 2019 by the siblings' mother Rafidah Ahmad, who also serves as the designer.

Muhammad Faris explained that instead of the batik canting method, for which Kelantan and Terengganu are famous, they employ the batik cap technique for their products.

Batik canting is a traditional wax-resist technique where hot wax is applied to fabric using a pen-like tool called a canting to create intricate, hand-drawn designs.

On the other hand, batik cap is a traditional Indonesian wax-resist technique in which artisans use a copper stamp, called a cap, to apply hot wax onto fabric.

The stamp is dipped in wax and pressed repeatedly to create a consistent, repeating pattern, making the process faster and more precise than hand-drawn batik.

"When we started in 2019, we only had the black pepper motif. Now we also have gambier, pineapple, mangrove apple (berembang) and durian motifs," said Muhammad Danial.

He said the black pepper and gambier motifs were chosen because these two crops were commercially cultivated in Johor in the 1840s, introduced by Chinese settlers who were predominantly from the Teochew clan.

Muhammad Danial noted that commercial cultivation of pineapple in Johor began to develop significantly from 1921, and the state was historically one of the world's leading pineapple producers during the 20th century.

He also said durian was chosen as a tribute to Segamat, a district renowned as a top durian destination in Malaysia, while mangrove apple fruit plants in Johor are primarily concentrated along the southwestern and southeastern coastlines, covering areas in Pontian, Johor Baru and Kota Tinggi.

"Our batik is different from others because it tells the story of Johor, with motifs depicting the history and flora of our state," he added.

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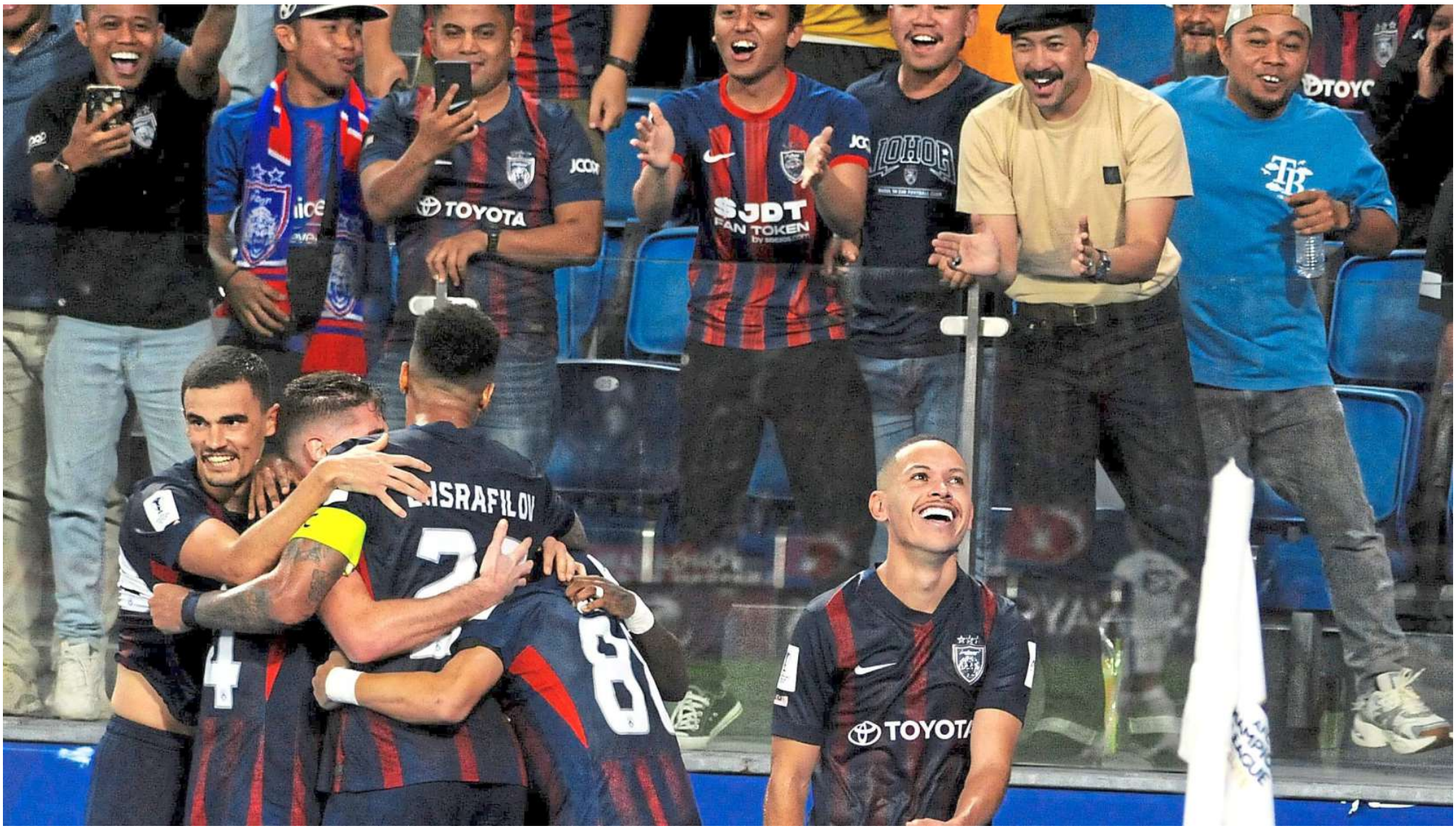

JDT players celebrating their goal during the AFC Champions League Elite knockout stage against Sanfrecce Hiroshima at Stadium Sultan Ibrahim in Iskandar Puteri earlier this month. JDT became the first Malaysian football club to qualify for the quarter-finals stage of the top regional football competition.

Southern Tigers roar across Asia

By MOHD FARHAAN SHAH
farhaan@thestar.com.my

THE Johor Darul Ta'zim (JDT) football club began its journey in 2013, transforming into one of Asia's biggest and most respected football clubs under the visionary leadership of Tunku Ismail Sultan Ibrahim.

The Johor Regent has been the driving force behind the club's rise, introducing professional management, modern infrastructure and a long-term vision that has seen JDT dominate Malaysian football and compete at the highest levels in Asia.

This vision bore fruit recently when JDT became the first Malaysian club to reach the quarter-finals of the AFC Champions League Elite (ACLE), marking a historic milestone for the club and Malaysian football.

Despite losing 0-1 to Sanfrecce Hiroshima in the away leg, JDT's earlier 3-1 home victory at the iconic Stadium Sultan Ibrahim ensured a narrow 3-2 aggregate win, allowing the Southern Tigers to advance to the last eight.

The achievement not only brings pride to Johor but also highlights Malaysia on the Asian football stage, proving that a club from the southern tip of the country can compete with continental giants.

State youth, sports, entrepreneur development and cooperatives committee chairman Mohd Hairi Mad Shah praised the team's historic progress.

"It is a testament to the talent, dedication and hard work of everyone involved with the club," he noted.

He added that the club's success reflects the leadership of Tunku Ismail, who remained steadfast despite criticism, proving that clear vision and determination can translate into records and achievements on the pitch.

Football in Johor was previously in the doldrums, with little success for local football fans in the state to shout about.

But its 2013 transformation set the club on a professional path, rebranding as JDT and creating a blueprint for sustained success.

Under Tunku Ismail's ownership, the club invested heavily in its facilities, including the construction of the state-of-the-art Stadium Sultan Ibrahim, which meets international standards and provides a world-class matchday experience.

The stadium has since become a fortress for the Southern Tigers, hosting domestic league matches, AFC competitions and serving as a symbol of the club's ambition.

Since its transformation, JDT has become Malaysia's most successful club, winning 12 consecutive Malaysia Super League titles from 2014.

The club has also claimed multiple domestic trophies, including Malaysia Cups, FA Cups, and Charity Shields, solidifying its dominance in Malaysian football.

In 2015, JDT became the first Malaysian club to win the AFC Cup, a landmark achievement that announced Malaysia's presence on the continental stage.

This success has since enabled JDT to attract top players from Europe, raising the standard of Malaysian football both on and off the pitch.

Mohd Hairi: The Southern Tigers have proven that with vision, commitment and hard work, Malaysian clubs can achieve greatness on the continental stage.

Mohd Hairi said JDT's recent qualification for the ACLE quarter-finals proves that visionary leadership, investment and strategic planning produce tangible results.

He praised Tunku Ismail for his unwavering focus and dedication, saying that the Johor Regent's commitment has helped the club overcome challenges and criticism alike.

JDT's supporters, known as the Boys of Straits, have been a key factor in the club's success, creating an intimidating atmosphere at home matches and supporting the team unconditionally.

The fans' passion has become a defining feature of the club, with matches at Stadium Sultan Ibrahim renowned for their electric energy and vibrant displays.

JDT emphasises disciplined football, blending strong defence with rapid attacking play, a style that has served them well in domestic and international competitions.

The club has also prioritised youth development through the JDT Academy, producing players who have gone on to join Malaysia's national football team.

The academy focuses on modern coaching methods, sports science, nutrition and mental conditioning to ensure that players reach their full potential.

Professionalism is a core value, with players and staff adhering to international standards in training, preparation and conduct.

Beyond football, the club has positively impacted Johor's economy, generating employment and stimulating local businesses through matchday activities.

JDT's ACLE quarter-final qualification has attracted attention across Asia, with clubs acknowledging the Southern Tigers as a serious competitor on the continental stage.

Tunku Ismail's leadership extends beyond the pitch, emphasising governance, financial stability and community engagement as key pillars of the club's operations.

Strategic sponsorships and merchandising initiatives have ensured financial sustainability, making JDT a model for other South-East Asian football clubs.

Mohd Hairi emphasised that the club's success is a source of national pride, demonstrating that Malaysian clubs can compete against Asia's best.

"The Southern Tigers have proven that with vision, commitment and hard work, Malaysian clubs can achieve greatness on the continental stage," he added.

JDT matches are broadcast widely across Asia, increasing exposure for Malaysian football and inspiring young players.

The club continues to innovate in fan engagement, digital media, and analytics to maintain competitive advantage and strengthen its brand internationally.

JDT has also been recognised for sportsmanship, community involvement and promoting fair play, reinforcing its role as a professional and responsible club.

The club's journey to the ACLE quarter-finals reflects years of meticulous planning, disciplined execution and sustained investment in talent and infrastructure.

Tunku Ismail's vision has transformed JDT into a continental powerhouse, achieving consistent performances at domestic and international levels.

Its success story highlights the importance of leadership, investment and community support in achieving sporting excellence.

Looking ahead, JDT aims to advance further in the ACLE, inspiring young footballers and raising Malaysia's profile in Asian football.

Mohd Hairi assured that the state government will continue supporting JDT's development, including infrastructure, youth programmes and professional standards.

In the years to come, JDT is expected to maintain its competitiveness, nurture talent and continue representing Malaysia with pride at the continental level.

"Let us continue to support JDT with unwavering unity and pride, ensuring that they carry Malaysia's name to the international stage," Mohd Hairi said.

Daulat Tuanku

Mengadap

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SULTAN YANG DIPERTUAN BAGI NEGERI DAN JAJAHAN TAKLUK JOHOR DARUL TA'ZIM YANG DI-PERTUAN AGONG

Merafak Sembah
Ucapan Setinggi-Tinggi Tahniah

Sempena
Sambutan Ulang Tahun Hari Keputeraan Rasmi Sultan Johor

Pada 23 Mac 2026 Bersamaan 3 Syawal 1447 Hijrah

Dengan Segala Hormat Takzimnya
Yang Berdatang Sembah

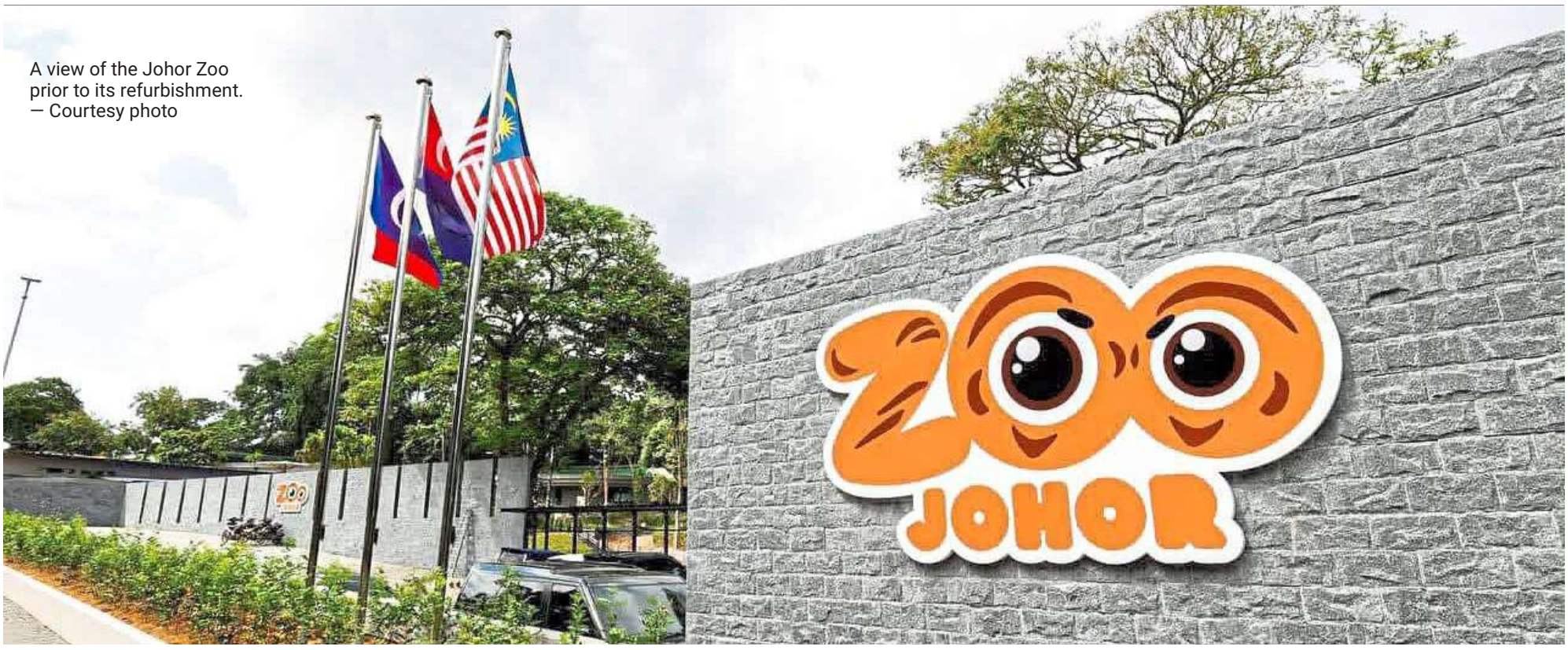
Kuok Brothers Sdn Bhd (1765-T)

Tanjung Bintang Sdn Bhd (152333-X)

Gunung Impian Development Sdn Bhd (211440-A)

Pandan Baru Sdn Bhd (321411-H)

Rawhide Sdn Bhd (201247-A)



A view of the Johor Zoo prior to its refurbishment. — Courtesy photo

Johor Zoo marks century-long legacy

By MYSARA FAUZI
newsdesk@thestar.com.my

ESTABLISHED nearly a century ago, the Johor Zoo is not only the oldest animal park in Malaysia, but also the first to be established in South-East Asia.

Behind the facility lies a symbol of royal heritage and a source of pride for the state.

Founded in 1928 by Almarhum Sultan Sir Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Sir Abu Bakar, the zoo was originally known as Kebun Binatang Istana Johor (Johor Palace Zoo).

What began as a private royal collection of exotic animals has now evolved into a public institution that highlights history, education and wildlife conservation.

It also incorporates modern standards in animal care and visitor experience.

In its early days, the animals displayed at the facility were more than just attractions - they were symbols of international diplomacy practised by the modern Johor Sultanate, said Johor housing and local government committee chairman Datuk Mohd Jafni Md Shukor.

"Most of the animals at the zoo's inception were part of the state Ruler's private collection, while others were gifted by international zoos.

"Among the animals gifted by the royal household were lions, Bengal tigers, black panthers, crocodiles, cassowaries and macaws," he said in an interview.

He added that the collections symbolised the sultanate's efforts to explore and forge diplomatic relations worldwide, placing Johor on equal footing with major global powers at that time.

"In addition, there were animals gifted from overseas, such as kangaroos and black swans from Perth Zoo in Australia, bears from Washington Zoo in the United States and macaws from South Africa," he said.

Initially, the public could enter the zoo for free.

> **Most of the animals at the zoo's inception were part of the state Ruler's private collection, while others were gifted by international zoos.**
>
> DATUK MOHD JAFNI MD SHUKOR

Mohd Jafni explained that the zoo's administration was officially handed over to the state government on April 1, 1962, and placed under the care of the local government division of the Johor State Secretary's Office.

"It then became known as the Johor Zoo and has remained open to the public ever since," he said.

He added that His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, the King of Malaysia, graciously presented a pair of Bengal tigers and a Malayan tapir to the zoo on Jan 8 last year.

"Today, the zoo houses about 70 animal species, comprising a total of 414 individual animals as of Dec 31 last year.

"The zoo is situated within the Istana Garden, covering about 4.73ha, offering visitors a unique atmosphere," he added.

He highlighted that a rejuvenation programme had been implemented to rebrand and modernise the park across multiple aspects.

"This includes improvements to the ticketing system, organisational restructuring, development of public facilities, upgrades to animal enclosures and the creation of play areas for children.

"However, some of the original animal enclosures have been preserved as heritage attractions, giving visitors the opportunity to appreciate the zoo's history," he said.

Mohd Jafni stated that the overall development project cost approximately RM15.6mil.

The first phase of upgrading works was completed at a cost of RM8.6mil, covering the upgrading of animal enclosures, improving the online ticketing system and enhancing public amenities such as restrooms, rest areas as well as play zones.

Phase two, with a budget of around RM7mil, focuses on inclusivity and new attractions, including the construction of accessible pathways for people with disabilities and strollers, allowing roughly 90% of the zoo to be easily navigated.

"Additionally, new enclosures have been built to house animals such as capybaras, wallabies, several carnivorous species and a Reptile House, further diversifying the zoo's offerings for visitors," he said.

Regarding animal welfare, he noted that the zoo also plans to build a veterinary centre to ensure the continuous well-being of its animals.

"The zoo will also seek professional expertise from Universiti Putra Malaysia in terms of consultation, research and human resources," he added.

In addition to daytime experiences, Mohd Jafni said a Night Zoo is expected to open in April as part of Visit Johor 2026.

"Upgrading works on lighting in animal enclosures and across the zoo grounds are currently underway to offer visitors a unique experience at night.

"Even as the Johor Zoo undergoes modernisation, it continues to preserve historical elements, allowing visitors to trace the evolution of zoo design and management over the decades," he said.

(From top) A tiger relaxing atop a rock; a sun bear on the move; a crocodile slowly emerging from the water; and a pair of chimpanzees enjoying the view from atop a tree at the Johor Zoo. — Photos from Johor Mentri Besar Onn Hafiz Ghazi's Facebook page

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Projek Berprestij oleh Kumpulan Genting

GENTING PLANTATIONS

GENTING PROPERTY

GENTING 优美城 Indahpura KULAI, JOHOR

GENTING 旺金城 Pura Kencana BATU PAHAT, JOHOR

THE STAR, MONDAY 23 MARCH 2026

Raja Zarith Sofiah gracing the Girl Guides Association of Malaysia's World Thinking Day 2026 – Our Friendship celebration at Dewan Wawasan in Jitra, Kedah, in January this year.

It was a memorable day for park-goers at the Perdana Botanical Gardens in Kuala Lumpur when the King himself stopped to engage with them during his morning exercise in July last year. — All photos from Sultan Ibrahim's official Facebook page

Sultan Ibrahim steering a boat from the Stulang Laut Royal Jetty in Johor Baru to inspect the waters of Johor before continuing his journey to Kota Tinggi last September.

Ruling Johor with understanding and foresight

Reigning with heart and purpose, His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia, is deeply respected for his active involvement in the lives of his people. Her Majesty Raja Zarith Sofiah, Queen of Malaysia, complements these efforts with her own dedication to education, sustainability and community welfare. Together, Their Majesties' commitment to the community serves as a foundation of Johor's identity, inspiring a spirit of togetherness across the state.

(Right) Sultan Ibrahim cradling a baby during his visit to the Ramadan bazaar at Taman Lauren Biru in Mersing, Johor, earlier this month.

(Below) Their Majesties officiating the launch of the Tunku Laksamana Johor Cancer Centre in Larkin, Johor Baru in December last year.

His Majesty being briefed on the progress of the Tunku Laksamana Abdul Jalil Mosque's construction during an audience session at Istana Pasir Pelangi, Johor Baru, in January.

Raja Zarith Sofiah observing young readers engrossed in a book at the launch of Bangsa Johor Bahagia 2.0 in Taman Plentong Utama, Johor Baru, in August last year.

His Majesty officiating the launch of the KTMB Electric Train Service 3 at the Kuala Lumpur Station last August. The King took the driver's seat to test-drive the train to the Kluang Station in Johor.

Sultan Ibrahim granting an audience to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim at Istana Bukit Tunku in Kuala Lumpur in February.

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Ketua-Ketua Jabatan Negeri, Persekutuan dan Daerah di Negeri Johor
Serta seluruh Warga Kerja Perkhidmatan Awam Negeri Johor