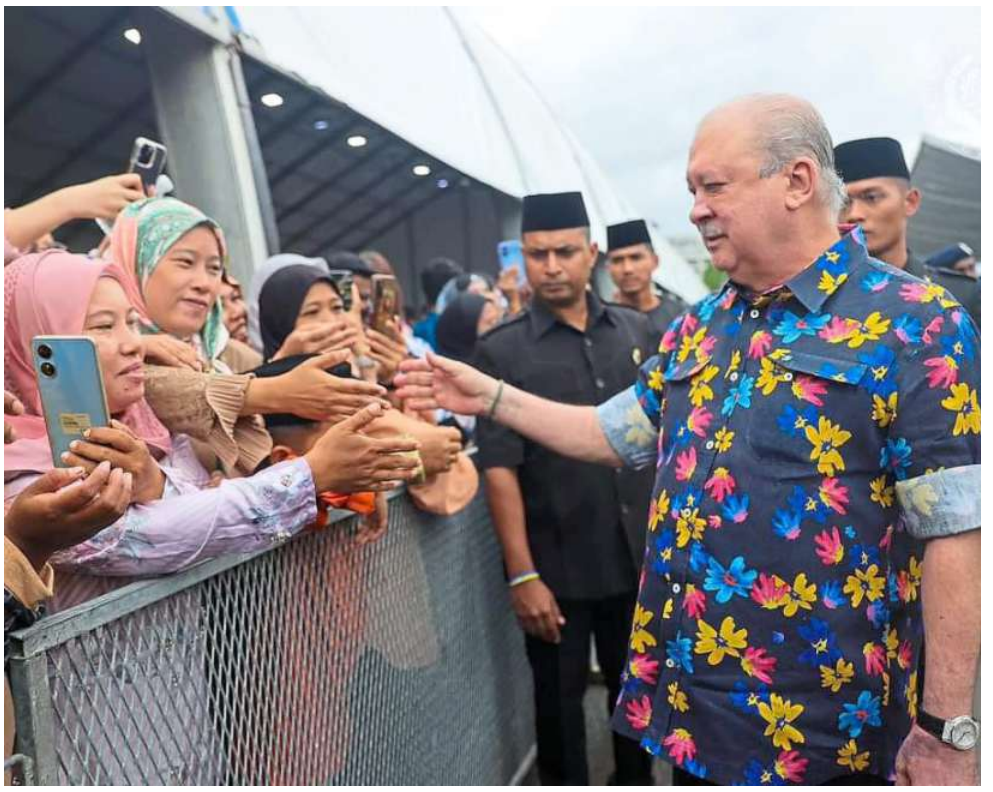
Star Special

THE STAR, SUNDAY 23 MARCH 2025

Long live His Majesty

The people wish Johor Ruler Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar, who is also the reigning King of Malaysia, continued health and blessings on his official birthday today.



(Above) Sultan Ibrahim holding an audience with Johor Mentri Besar Datuk Onn Hafiz Ghazi at his palace in Pasir Pelangi regarding current affairs, including Johor's economy. — Photos taken from Sultan Ibrahim's official Facebook page

(Left) His Majesty greeting the crowd during an open house at Istana Besar, Johor Baru, in November 2024.

Champion of harmony and racial unity

Sultan Ibrahim with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim at the opening of the first meeting of the fourth session of the 15th Parliament at the Parliament building in Kuala Lumpur in February.

By NELSON BENJAMIN
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JOHOR Ruler Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar has always had a soft spot for the welfare of his subjects, especially flood victims.

Earlier this year, during a flood in Kota Tinggi, Sultan Ibrahim set aside time from his busy schedule as the King of Malaysia to personally visit two flood relief centres, offering comfort and support to the victims.

Meanwhile, at the height of the devastating floods in November last year, which affected at least seven states and tens of thousands of victims, Sultan Ibrahim offered prayers for the victims to be granted protection, strength and patience.

Sultan Ibrahim also instructed the National Disaster Management Agency (Nadma) to ensure that facilities at temporary flood relief centres are well maintained and that assistance reaches the victims promptly.

The King also urged the public to remain vigilant, take preventive measures amid unpredictable weather conditions and stay alert for instructions from the authorities.

Sultan Ibrahim has consistently directed his Sultan Ibrahim Johor Foundation to provide aid to flood victims during the annual flood season.

Over the years, the foundation has provided more than RM200mil in aid to the people, including thousands of tents ahead of anticipated floods in Johor and other states.

Sultan Ibrahim and Permaisuri Johor Raja Zarith Sofiah Binti Almarhum Sultan Idris Shah have always paid close attention to the welfare of the people and provided assistance to countless Johoreans facing hardships during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Sultan Ibrahim is known as one of the few leaders who never shies away from speaking his mind, especially on matters concerning the welfare of his subjects.

Even before his installation as the country's 17th King on Jan 31 last year, Sultan Ibrahim had been making trips abroad to "strengthen and build bridges of friendship" with world leaders.

To date, the Ruler has met many leaders from China, Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei and the Middle East.

One of his major state visits was to China, where Sultan Ibrahim met with President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang in September last year.

Sultan Ibrahim also shares a close bond with Indonesian president Prabowo Subianto, whom His Majesty has known for more than four decades.

Earlier this year, Sultan Ibrahim bestowed the Darjah Kerabat Johor Yang Amat Dihormati I to Prabowo during his official visit to Malaysia.

Sultan Ibrahim is also friendly with leaders from neighbouring Singapore and has met with the republic's Prime Minister Lawrence Wong and President Tharman Shanmugaratnam.

Since ascending the Johor throne in 2010, Sultan Ibrahim has never hesitated to voice his opinions or express his displeasure on various issues, including reprimanding politicians who sow distrust and disunity among the people.

In 2017, Sultan Ibrahim ordered a controversial launderette in Muar to immediately stop its discriminatory practice of allowing only Muslims to use its facilities, or risk being shut down by the Ruler himself.

The Johor Ruler also criticised a former Cabinet minister for giving a ceramah at a mosque, stressing that political elements were barred at all mosques in the state.

In 2023, following allegations that only Muslim students from an all-girls school were invited to a Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia workshop at a hotel in Johor Baru, Sultan Ibrahim decreed that no one should be excluded from any public programme based on race or religion.

The Ruler has also been active on his official Facebook page, which currently has over 1.1 million followers, sharing his thoughts and comments on various matters.

Social media has also been Sultan Ibrahim's preferred communication platform on several occasions to express his displeasure over cleanliness and environmental matters – issues close to His Majesty's heart.

At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, Sultan Ibrahim appealed to his subjects to remain calm, adhere to the advice given and follow the standard operating procedures set by the Health Ministry.

Sultan Ibrahim meeting Prabowo during the latter's official visit to Malaysia in January.

Sultan Ibrahim also called upon the people to band together to curb the spread of the virus and to stop the spread of fake news, and directed teachers to get vaccinated to prevent spreading the virus to their students.

The Ruler is also a firm believer in Bangsa Johor, a concept aimed at fostering greater unity among the people of the state.

Sultan Ibrahim emphasises racial unity and seeks representation from Malay, Chinese and Indian NGOs in his Kembara Mahkota Johor committee to provide feedback and input on the annual expedition.

Despite His Majesty's sternness, Sultan Ibrahim is also known as a compassionate Ruler who is beloved and respected by his subjects.

Those who have met Sultan Ibrahim describe His Majesty as a warm-hearted Ruler with an amiable personality and a good sense of humour.

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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 2025 Bersamaan 22 Ramadan 1446 Hijrah

Dengan Segala Hormat Takzimnya
Yang Berdatang Sembah

Sime Darby Property

SIME DARBY PROPERTY BERHAD (197301002148)

Sultan Ibrahim celebrating his birthday with Raja Zarith Sofiah, his children and grandchildren last year. — Photos taken from Sultan Ibrahim's official Facebook page

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A wise Ruler who leads by example

The Ruler's gentle and compassionate side is often revealed through His Majesty's reactions when listening to stories of pain and suffering from his people, becoming visibly moved and teary-eyed.

On Oct 25, 2016, following a fire at Sultanah Aminah Hospital that claimed the lives of six patients, the Ruler once again showed his care for the people by instructing the hospital administration to use the royal ward to temporarily accommodate patients displaced by the tragedy.

Three years later, the Johor royal family demonstrated their concern during the Sungai Kim Kim chemical pollution crisis in Pasir Gudang.

They made at least three visits to victims at Sultan Ismail Hospital and the Pasir Gudang Indoor Stadium, where medical units had been set up.

Sultan Ibrahim, who comes from a lineage of strong-willed, savvy and independent Rulers, is passionate about transforming Johor into a modern and progressive state. The Sultan's vision is to transform the state into Malaysia's next economic powerhouse after the Klang Valley.

Sultan Ibrahim was crowned the fifth Ruler of modern Johor in March 2015, marking a historical moment as the last coronation in the state was held for his late grandfather, Almarhum Sultan Ismail Ibni Almarhum Sultan Ibrahim, in February 1960.

A savvy investor with interests in a variety of local and foreign businesses, the Ruler is also an avid traveller, much like his ancestors who embarked on various voyages.

The Sultan regularly takes top Johor state officials and heads of government-linked companies along on these business and trade trips abroad to attract more investments to the state.

One of his passions is collecting both classic and modern cars and motorcycles, all of which are housed in garages within the palace grounds.

Sultan Ibrahim is also proud of his latest palace in Mersing, better known as Istana Flintstones.

Located on a 24ha site overlooking the sea and featuring a nine-storey lighthouse, this palace is now a popular tourist attraction in Mersing.

The Flintstones was an American animated series set against a romanticised Stone Age backdrop and gained immense popularity during its run from the early to mid-1960s.

The Ruler values his connection with his subjects and takes great pride in the Kembara Mahkota Johor programme, which began in 2001. However, the event has been on hold since 2020 due to the pandemic.

Led by the Ruler, this vehicle expedition fosters closer ties between Johor's royal family and the people through various programmes held at each stop along the journey.

Sultan Ibrahim's passion for sports is also well known. In his youth, he excelled at polo, competing not only locally but also in tournaments across Singapore, Brunei and the Philippines.

The Ruler earned the distinction of being the best polo player in Asia during the polo world qualifications in the 1990s.

In addition, Sultan Ibrahim enjoys parasailing, boating (jet skiing), parachuting, shooting and driving sports cars. He once emerged as the champion in a falling plate shooting event organised by the army at the Malaysian Army Combat Training Centre (Pulada) in Johor.

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 studying at Trinity Grammar School in Australia. Later, Sultan Ibrahim travelled to the United States to pursue his studies in law and diplomacy.

The Ruler also obtained his religious education from Sekolah Agama Air Molek in Johor Baru.

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

Sultan Ibrahim also received military training in the United States at Fort Benning, Georgia, and later at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He was appointed deputy commander of the Johor Military Force upon completing his military training overseas.

The Ruler has trained and served in the Air Force and Navy, and is a qualified green beret commando in Malaysia and the United States. Sultan Ibrahim is also a member of the Red Beret Kompasus of Indonesia and a fully qualified divemaster.

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

In 1981, he was proclaimed the Tunku Mahkota of Johor.

Sultan Ibrahim is married to Raja Zarith Sofiah, a Perak princess and an 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.

(Left) Sultan Ibrahim enjoying a horse ride with Johor Regent Tunku Ismail at Istana Pasir Pelangi, Johor Baru, in September last year.

(Below) The Ruler mingling with people during breakfast at a restaurant in Kuala Lumpur last October.

Daulat Tuanku

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Tan Sri Dato' Sri Mohamad Fuzi Bin Harun (Independent Non-Executive Chairman),
Tan Sri Dato' Tan Chee Sing (Group Executive Vice Chairman),
Board of Directors, Management and Staff Members of

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[Registration No: 197901003695 (47908K)]
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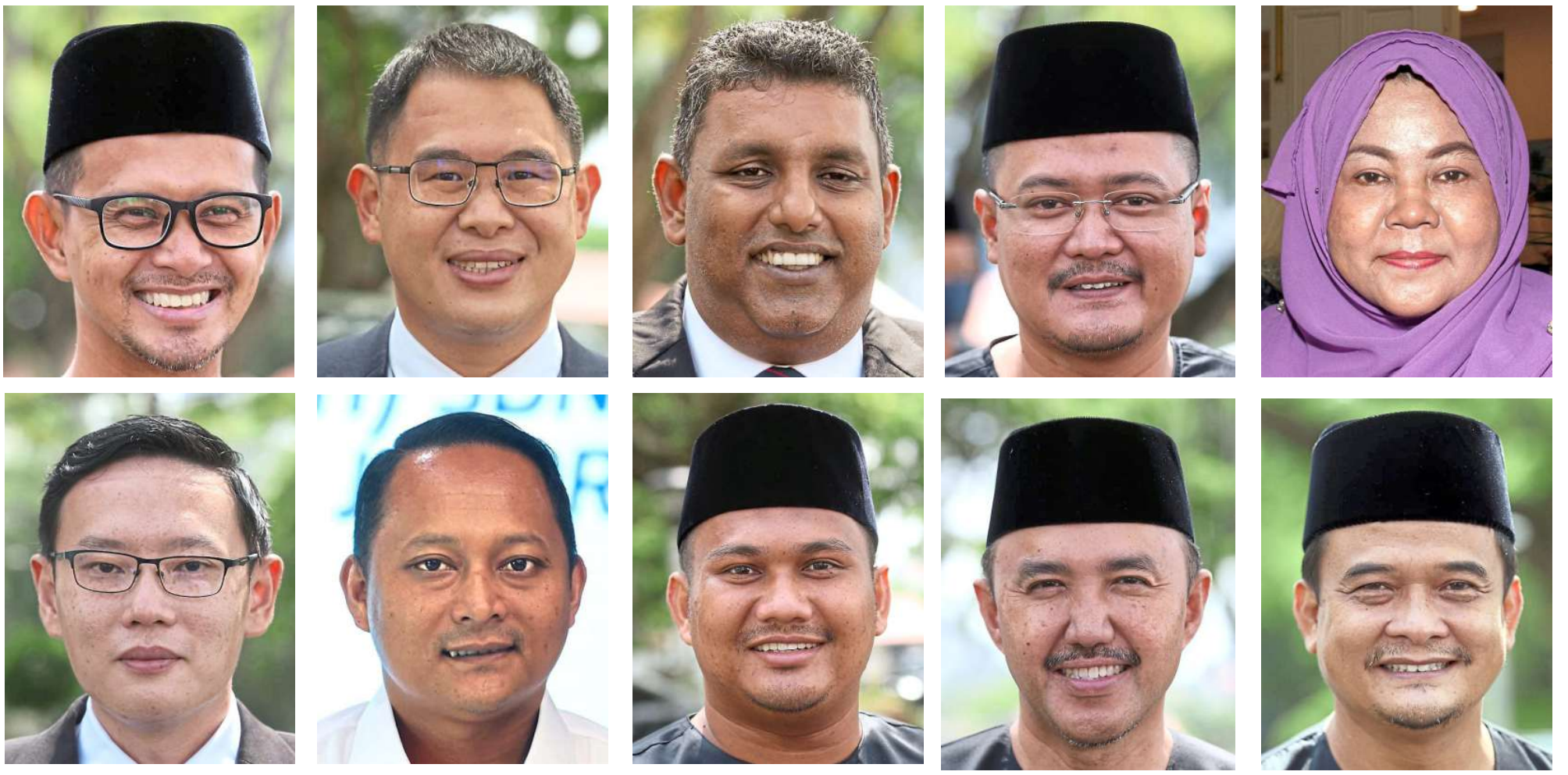
Building a better future for Johor



(Clockwise from top left) Mohd Fared, Ling, Raven Kumar, Mohd Hairi, Khairin Nisa, Zahari, Mohd Jafni, Mohamad Fazli, Aznan and Lee.

By VENESA DEVI
venesa@thestar.com.my

FROM education to environmental issues, Johor Ruler Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar never fails to champion Johor's growth and welfare, say state executive councillors.

They said the guidance and advice of Sultan Ibrahim, who is also the King of Malaysia, have been instrumental in shaping policies and driving progress across various sectors in the state.

Johor education and information committee chairman Aznan Tamin said His Majesty takes education seriously, often emphasising the need to improve the education system.

"His Majesty emphasises the importance of enhancing the quality of the education system, which has also led to the introduction of Sekolah Rintis Johor.

"The initiative is in line with His Majesty's advice in ensuring that the education system in Johor remains at its best.

"This initiative also focuses on providing quality infrastructure and facilities to create a conducive and effective learning environment for children in Johor," he said.

Aznan also thanked Sultan Ibrahim for contributing 226 smart televisions to schools across the state through the Sultan Ibrahim Foundation.

"This was not just a technological contribution. It was also a testament to His Majesty's dedication to the development of education," he added.

Johor Islamic religious affairs committee chairman Mohd Fared Mohd Khalid said Sultan Ibrahim also plays a pivotal role in modernising mosques and suraus across the state.

"His Majesty decreed that mosques be enhanced with the active participation of all community members, including the younger generation.

"His Majesty also decreed that mosques and suraus in Johor be modernised, which is why we are implementing the initiative to install free Wi-Fi at mosques and suraus throughout the state," he said, adding that the initiative is being carried out in stages.

Sultan Ibrahim's guidance and advice have been instrumental in shaping policies and driving progress across various sectors in Johor.

He said His Majesty's firm yet encouraging words give him the strength to fulfil his duties.

Johor unity, heritage and culture committee chairman K. Raven Kumar said His Majesty plays a vital role in fostering and maintaining unity in the state.

"Sultan Ibrahim is someone who takes unity very seriously, always emphasising the importance of respecting each other's race and religion.

"His Majesty is not afraid to speak his mind when seeing something amiss that could disrupt peace and unity among his subjects. Additionally, His Majesty frequently attends festivals and events of people from all races and cultures, setting a positive example for Johoreans," he said.

Johor investment, trade, consumer affairs and human resources committee chairman Lee Ting Han described Sultan Ibrahim as a wise leader with extensive experience and knowledge in various fields.

"His Majesty always has interesting insights to share with us and can perceive things that others may not be able to see.

"His Majesty's perspective is invaluable to us, and we are privileged to have a Ruler who is both knowledgeable and experienced," he said.

According to Johor housing and local government committee chairman Datuk Mohd Jafni Md Shukor, Sultan Ibrahim's insight and advice have been invaluable, particularly for the upgrading of the Johor Zoo.

"His Majesty highlighted the importance of safeguarding animal welfare while maintaining the zoo as an educational and recreational hub for the community.

"These insights have served as a key guide in our efforts to improve the management and facilities of the zoo. What made it even more special was His Majesty's gracious gift of several animals from the Johor Palace to the Johor Zoo," he noted.

Johor youth, sports, entrepreneur development and cooperatives committee chairman Mohd Hairi Mad Shah said His Majesty always reminds state leaders of their duty to serve the people.

"His Majesty keeps a close eye on the development of the state, not just in terms of infrastructure and economy, but also in terms of sports and entrepreneurship.

"His Majesty always reminds us to prioritise the people's needs above all else," he said.

Johor health and unity committee chairman Ling Tian Soon said Sultan Ibrahim advocates for the importance of preserving and protecting the environment.

"His Majesty often uses social media to highlight environmental issues, which has really helped to raise awareness among the public," he said, adding that he is very grateful to His Majesty.

Ling said Sultan Ibrahim has also pushed for better medical facilities in Johor, including the upgrading of busy hospitals such as Sultanah Aminah Hospital.

Johor agriculture, agro-based industry and rural committee chairman Datuk Zahari Sarip said Sultan Ibrahim has never neglected development in rural areas.

"His Majesty wants all Johoreans to benefit from the state's development and not just those living in the cities.

"Sultan Ibrahim always reminds us about this whenever we introduce any new initiatives and programmes," he said.

Johor women's family and community development committee chairman Khairin-Nisa Ismail said Sultan Ibrahim understands the needs of Johoreans well.

"Sultan Ibrahim takes the welfare of the rakyat very seriously, as we can see from the countless charitable acts His Majesty has done for the people. Sultan Ibrahim has always reminded me to be hands-on and ensure that the agencies under my charge do everything they can to help the people," she added.

Johor works, transportation and infrastructure committee chairman Mohamad Fazli Mohamad Salleh said Sultan Ibrahim has always been committed to ensuring that development projects benefit the people and the state.

"His Majesty places great importance on the development of Johor and continuously monitors the state's rapid progress.

"To realise the vision of Johor Maju 2030, His Majesty consistently provides guidance to ensure that the state government works hard for the people," he said.

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Group Managing Director

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Royal passion for cooking

By YEE XIANG YUN
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FROM sizzling lamb chops to fragrant nasi briyani, Johor Ruler Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar is no stranger to the kitchen.

Cooking has long been one of the Ruler's pastimes, and His Majesty often shares glimpses of his culinary creations with the people through photos and videos posted on his official Facebook page.

Despite his many responsibilities as the 17th King of Malaysia, Sultan Ibrahim continues to find time to cook mouth-watering dishes for his staff.

In October last year, Sultan Ibrahim prepared a special Japanese curry for his officers, using Japanese beef with a blend of traditional spices and ingredients along with a local touch.

While cooking, His Majesty interacted with the staff who also witnessed his skills in preparing the food, according to a post shared on the King's official Facebook page.

Over the years, His Majesty has prepared a variety of dishes including bread crumb-crusted lamb chops served with mashed potatoes, lobster nasi briyani and gulai nanas (a curry-like dish made with fresh pineapples).

On other occasions, Sultan Ibrahim makes traditional snacks like sardine-filled curry puffs to share with the palace staff.

These posts often receive praise from the rakyat, with many lauding the King's culinary skills and others appreciating such glimpses into the monarch's more "domestic" side.

In a 2015 Facebook post, His Majesty remarked, "Cooking is not alchemy; there's no magic in the pot. As a cook, you must bring soul to the recipe."

Sultan Ibrahim goes beyond just cooking for his staff as the Ruler once took the time to personally prepare meals for flood victims at a relief centre in Segamat.

On that occasion, Sultan Ibrahim arrived at the Balairaya Gemerah 4 shelter to meet with the flood victims and listen to their experiences.

Then, the Ruler surprised the families by cooking fried rice for them, aiming to lift their spirits after the natural disaster.

Similarly, Sultan Ibrahim made it a point to cook bubur lambuk – a porridge dish filled with meat, spices and vegetables that is typically eaten during the holy month of Ramadan – to share with the less privileged.

In 2021, His Majesty added a "special touch" to the dish, stirring it with a custom-made wooden spatula engraved with his initials.

According to the Royal Press Office, the utensil, which was made from heavy timbre and epoxy resin, was crafted by the Ruler's personal carpenter in Mersing that same year.

The Ruler was seen cooking up a storm with palace staff to ensure that the pots of porridge were cooked well and packed and distributed to the public in time for the breaking of fast.

The bubur lambuk was then distributed to cancer patients at Sultanah Aminah Hospital and Sultan Ismail Hospital, as well as the rakyat in Kluang.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Sultan Ibrahim also personally prepared bubur lambuk for frontliners during Ramadan, including those on roadblock duty.

The Ruler was accompanied by Permaisuri Johor Raja Zarith Sofiah Binti Almarhum Sultan Idris Shah while His Majesty cooked the porridge in large pots.

In a recent interview with Bernama, Sultan Ibrahim's personal chef Hamdan Dollah, who has been serving His Majesty for the past 13 years, noted that the Ruler can cook a variety of dishes, including Western and Chinese cuisines.

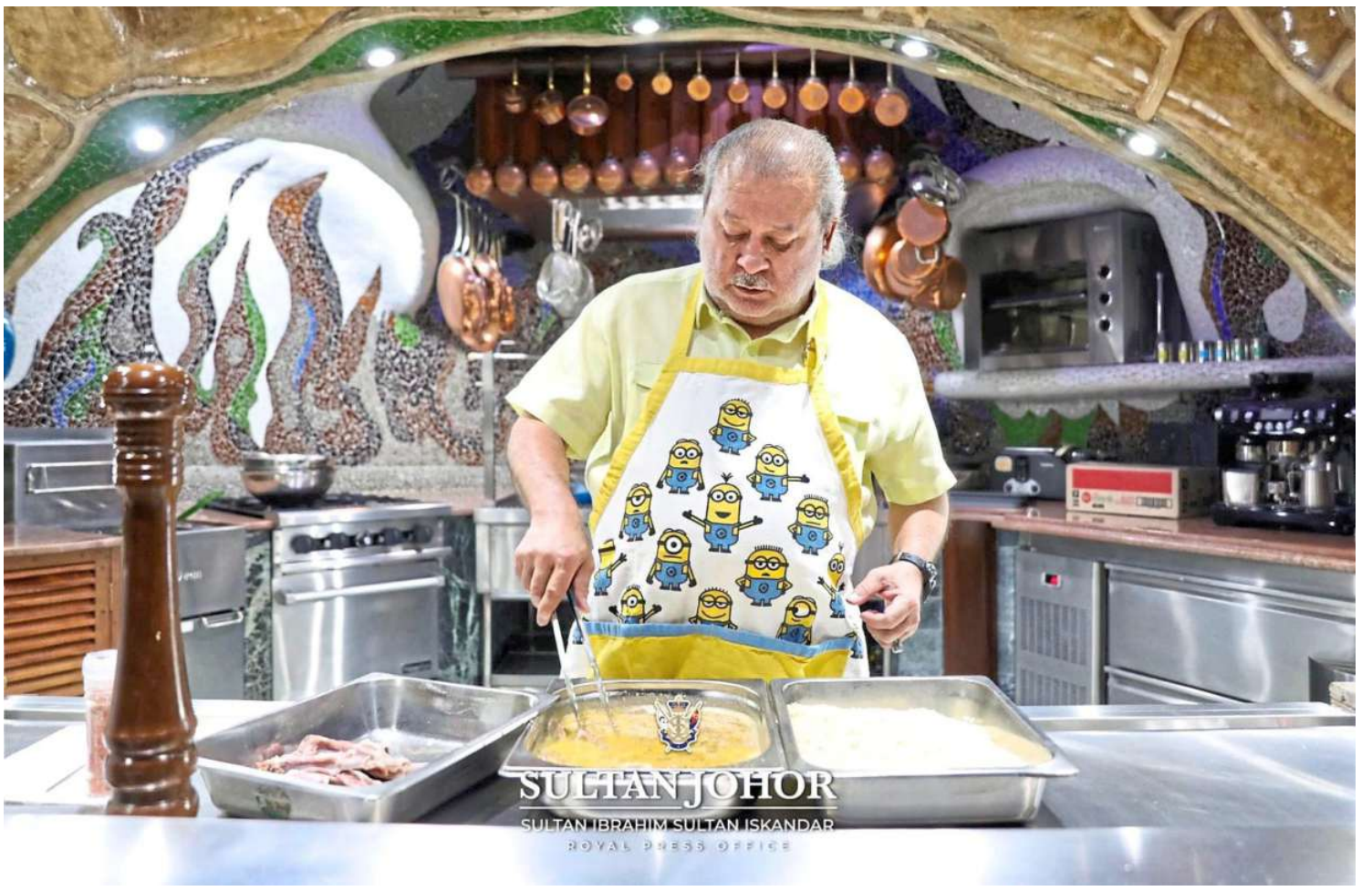
"The King also likes to cook in large quantities to share with the palace staff," the 57-year-old said, adding that His Majesty has a personal doctor who advises him on the nutritional aspects of food.

The chef also shared insights into Sultan Ibrahim's sensitivity to flavours, noting that His Majesty is particular about achieving a balance of salty, sour and sweet.

According to Hamdan, Sultan Ibrahim prefers his dishes to have a hint of spiciness and not be overly sweet.

"His Majesty enjoys traditional kampung dishes such as asam pedas, gulai nanas ikan kering, ulam with sambal belacan, siput sedut and boiled clams," he said.

> **Cooking is not alchemy; there's no magic in the pot. As a cook, you must bring soul to the recipe.**
>
> HIS MAJESTY SULTAN IBRAHIM, KING OF MALAYSIA



Sultan Ibrahim preparing a meal of bread crumb-crusted lamb chops and mashed potatoes at Istana Flintstones in Mersing in November 2020. — All photos courtesy of His Majesty's official Facebook page

His Majesty is known to make a variety of dishes to share with his staff such as sardine-filled curry puffs, Japanese curry and lamb chops.

(Above) Sultan Ibrahim stirring a pot of bubur lambuk with a custom-made wooden spatula (left) made from heavy timbre and epoxy resin in April 2021.

Daulat Tuanku

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Pengerusi, Ahli-ahli Lembaga Pengarah,
Pengurusan dan Warga Kerja

SUNWAY CITY
ISKANDAR PUTERI

Bangsa Johor drives state vision

By ZAZALI MUSA
metro@thestar.com.my

BANGSA Johor has its own role to play in helping the Johor government achieve its vision and mission to transform Johor into a developed state by 2030. *The Star* speaks to six Johoreans about their hopes and expectations for the state reaching new heights within the next five years.

Legal secretary Dahlia Nonteh Mohd Mokhtar, 47, said they all have to work together with a common goal to see their beloved state develop further.

"We already have the right ecosystem, but we still need the human factor to ensure that our journey to becoming a developed state is a success," she said.

Dahlia added that with just under five years to go, the journey ahead may not always be smooth, but with the "never give up" attitude of Bangsa Johor, it can be done.

Digital marketing specialist Marcus Tan said the next five years will be exciting to watch as Johor transforms itself into a developed state.

"Everybody is watching closely, not only Bangsa Johor but also Malaysians in general, to see whether we will meet the 2030 target or not," he said.

Tan, 32, pointed out that the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ) is poised to see a diverse range of economic activities unfold in the state, without depending on just one sector.

He said this will lead to a robust and diversified economy and advanced technological infrastructure where the service sector dominates.

Johor Area Rehabilitation Organisation (Jaro) general manager Joseph Roy Arputham said he hopes charity bodies will benefit immensely with the developed economy.

(Clockwise from top left) Vanitha, Dahlia, Nor Azman, Tan, See and Joseph. — ZAZALI MUSA/The Star

"Charity bodies like ours depend on grants from both the state and federal levels, as well as donations from individuals, businesses and corporate bodies," he said.

Joseph added that when the economy is stable and strong, charity bodies can expect good financial contributions from generous donors.

With steady funds in the coffers, charity bodies can take in more underprivileged and unfortunate individuals into organizations such as Jaro to provide skill training, he noted.

Civil servant Nor Azman Mohd Isa urged the state's representatives to put aside their political differences to ensure the success of the 2025-2030 blueprint.

"Always raise issues concerning the well-being and welfare of the people during the state legislative assembly sittings or outside the August House," he said.

The 56-year-old said economic-related matters should not only be their focus as Johor moves toward becoming a developed state, but also day-to-day issues that require their attention.

Nor Azman added that, as elected representatives, taxpayers and voters expect them to address many issues with short-, medium- and long-term solutions.

Jeff See Shiang Tun, who started working in Singapore in 2024, said he is looking forward to coming back and working in Johor Baru in the future.

"The lack of job opportunities, plus the strength of Singapore's currency, is the main reason why Johoreans and locals from other states migrate to work in Singapore," he said.

See recalled how Johor lawmakers had for many years raised the issue of losing locals to Singapore, but the problem remains unresolved to this day.

The 33-year said he hopes there will be more job opportunities and growth prospects as Johor prepares to become a developed state about five years from now.

Financial administrative assistant Vanitha A/P T. Sivaraja, 47, said she is looking forward to a better transportation network within Iskandar Malaysia.

"We are still far behind when it comes to comprehensive transportation connectivity in Iskandar Malaysia, unlike in the Klang Valley," said Vanitha.

She added that the federal and Johor governments need to address the matter with fewer talks and publicity stunts, focusing instead on delivering results for the benefit of the rakyat in Johor.

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TASEK MAJU

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Fresh vision for the future

The Iskandar Malaysia Facilitation Centre Johor (IMFC-J) in Forest City is a one-stop centre to help investors. — THOMAS YONG/The Star

LAUNCHED with great fanfare in 2006, Iskandar Malaysia has been instrumental in transforming southern Johor into an economic powerhouse over the past 19 years.

With the establishment of the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ), **NELSON BENJAMIN** speaks with Iskandar Regional Development Authority (Irda) chief executive officer Datuk Mohd Noorazam Osman about its continued relevance and the new narrative for the growth corridor.

Mohd Noorazam, seen here with *The Star* news editor Nelson Benjamin, emphasises inter-agency efforts and pragmatism in achieving Irda's goals.

You took over as Irda's chief executive officer on Jan 14 this year. Can you share more about your background and your plans for the organisation?

Previously, I was mayor of the Johor Baru City Council (MBJB). When the senior leadership offered me the opportunity to lead Irda, I took it as a career progression from managing a city to managing a region. Irda's scope covers an area managed by five local councils: MBJB, Iskandar Puteri City Council (MBIP), Pasir Gudang City Council (MBPG), Kulai Municipal Council (MPKU) and Pontian Municipal Council (MPP).

I have been in the Johor civil service for the past 34 years and served in various positions including in the land office, as a private secretary to former mentri besar Tan Sri Abdul Ghani Othman, in Johor's economic planning unit (Upen), twice as district officer of Kota Tinggi and Muar, twice as chief executive officer of Sukma Malaysia and Kumpulan Prasarana Rakyat Johor, a state government-linked company, and finally as mayor.

If you look at my career progression, I have experience in planning, worked on the ground as a district officer and have experience in GLCs. I have also been involved in sports. With my federal role at Irda, I feel that I have come full circle in terms of being a civil servant.

Serving in Irda is a new experience for me, particularly in terms of acting as a bridge between the state and federal governments.

I was involved in the initial formation of Iskandar Malaysia during my time in Upen, when it was still known as the South Johor Economic Region. I was part of the team that helped plan the agenda and represented the state, working closely with the federal government to shape the Iskandar Malaysia initiative.

Thus, I am happy to be given an opportunity to be part of JS-SEZ, which symbolises a strong commitment between two countries to develop an economic zone.

How would you describe your leadership style at Irda and what are your hopes for Iskandar Malaysia in the next three to five years?

Next year, Iskandar Malaysia will reach an important milestone – its 20th anniversary (2006–2026). Over the years, some have said that Irda has not fully achieved its original goals. However, I believe they may not fully understand the value Irda has added. We will continue to enhance the work of the state, local authorities and district offices at the ground level.

With this new narrative and the establishment of the JS-SEZ, I believe Irda remains relevant and plays a crucial role in facilitating investment. I use the word "facilitate" rather than "promote" as promotion is not our core function.

Promotional activities fall under the Malaysian Investment Development Authority (Mida) and the Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry while in Johor, they are handled by Invest Johor.

Irda is here to facilitate investments by providing guidance in obtaining approvals. Ease of doing business is a key agenda we must fulfil.

Investment approvals involve multiple levels of government – federal, state, local authorities and sometimes agencies. Our role is to coordinate and ensure compliance with the standards and key performance indicators set by these agencies, such as the Johor Super Lanes, which aim to facilitate certain investments.

This coordination is crucial, and we hope Irda can effectively engage federal agencies to coordinate and prioritise the approvals needed for the JS-SEZ.

Do you think Irda has achieved all of its goals so far?

I would say that while we have not fully achieved everything, we have played our part in further enhancing this economic corridor. I am confident that we can achieve more by working closely with other agencies and developing pragmatic plans to translate initiatives into tangible outcomes at the ground level.

People often ask us what we can gain from Iskandar Malaysia or the JS-SEZ. In reality, the JS-SEZ is a journey. If you compare us to places like Hong Kong and Shenzhen, it took them about 40 years to reach their current status.

We are somewhat unique as we are also close to Singapore, another developed country. However, we must be prepared not only with the necessary infrastructure and enablers but also with the right small and medium enterprises to participate in the global supply chain.

Singapore is a global hub for many multinational corporations. If they start moving this way due to comparative advantages in terms of cost and ease of doing business, I am confident that we will see an influx of companies coming to the JS-SEZ.

We hope to facilitate Malaysian companies in becoming part of that supply chain as well. Look at big names such as BYD and Huawei, both of which originated in Shenzhen. This is why there is a strong effort to grow local companies. I believe this is where political will comes into play, allowing us to explore how this can work.

Past CEOs of Irda came from corporate Malaysia or outside Johor, and there was a perception that they lacked a deep understanding of Johor's issues. As a senior Johor Civil Service (JCS) officer leading Irda, how are you running it differently? Are there any particular issues close to your heart that you aim to address as a Johorean?

My predecessor, Datuk Dr Badrul Hisham Kassim, was also from JCS. As a Johorean, I want to see Irda's agenda and projects become more localised so that locals can truly experience the benefits. Public awareness is crucial; unfortunately, many people are unaware of Irda's role.

Irda is a federal authority empowered to coordinate and facilitate, not approve, projects. Therefore, approvals must still be obtained from local councils or agencies.

> TURN TO PAGE 14

Iskandar Malaysia fact sheet

1 **When was Iskandar Malaysia formed:** Formed in 2006, Iskandar Malaysia was formerly known as the South Johor Economic Region (SJER).

2

What is the size of Iskandar Malaysia: 2,300sq/km

3 **What are the key sectors promoted in the region:** 11 sectors namely logistics, manufacturing, financial services, business services, digital economy, tourism, food security, education, health, energy and green economy.

4 **What is the total investment in the growth corridor since the start:** RM453.3bil (as of Sept 2024, which is above the target of RM383bil under the Iskandar Malaysia Comprehensive Development Plan)

5 **Top three foreign investors in Iskandar Malaysia:** China, Singapore, the Netherlands

6 **Total jobs created since Iskandar Malaysia's launch:** 1.2 million

7 **Top three major success stories of Iskandar Malaysia that have benefitted the people:**
A: Rumah Iskandar Malaysia
B: Sg Segget Rejuvenation
C: Iskandar Coastal Highway

TheStargraphics

Daulat Tuanku

Mengadap

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The Iskandar Coastal Road is an important link between Johor Baru and the state's administrative capital Kota Iskandar. — THOMAS YONG/The Star

The multi-storey centralised sewerage treatment plant is used to help rehabilitate Sungai Segget in Johor Baru. — THOMAS YONG/The Star

A crucial bridge between state and federal govts

Transit houses, known as Rumah Iskandar, have been built in Iskandar Puteri to provide affordable rentals for job seekers.

> FROM PAGE 12

That's where we step in to facilitate, working across agency boundaries to improve the ease of doing business.

We also help to add more value to government processes. For instance, in the case of Smart City initiatives, when I was the mayor, I established a command centre in MBJB to enhance operations. In the future, Irda will play a role in conducting analytics.

While I am not planning to create a command centre here, the data we gather from the local councils will enable us to perform analytics for data crunching and decision-making purposes. This way, we can assist the councils without duplicating efforts.

What major projects have been implemented in Iskandar Malaysia?

Major projects include the 40km Iskandar Coastal Road, which connects Johor Baru to Kota Iskandar, and the rehabilitation and upgrading of Sungai Segget, which involved constructing a sewage treatment plant.

We have also implemented flood mitigation measures along Sungai Tebrau and beautification works along Sungai Skudai. Additionally, we have built transit homes known as Rumah Iskandar, providing affordable rentals for up to 10 years, particularly for job seekers.

Funds have also been allocated to support the Orang Asli community and provide technical and vocational education and training for youths. We have also developed basic infrastructure to promote eco-tourism.

With 19 years of milestones, what is next for Irda?

Our current focus is the JS-SEZ. The Economy Ministry has announced a RM5bil allocation under the 13th Malaysia Plan for the JS-SEZ. Our job is to channel these funds and plan their allocation effectively.

Our top priority will be to invest in vital infrastructure and enablers. We aim to build infrastructure for industries and ensure that locals benefit from incoming investments.

Among other initiatives, we will study traffic dispersal issues within the JS-SEZ, such as adding more feeder bus services or park-and-ride facilities. We will also look at flood mitigation measures since we have had floods at industrial parks due to drainage issues.

Irda regularly releases figures on investments flowing into the growth corridor. What is the latest investment figure, and how does Irda monitor these investments to ensure they are implemented effectively and benefit the people?

Based on the figures from agencies such as Mida, cumulative committed investment recorded as of September 2024 is RM453.3bil. This surpassed the initial target of RM383bil for 2025 as per our Comprehensive Development Plan. Moving forward, as part of the information consolidation exercise, our investment figures will be based on Mida's announcement.

With the JS-SEZ, the narrative will propel the corridor's growth for the next 10 years based on the targets set by Malaysia and Singapore. One day, we hope to create an area like the Klang Valley, known as Greater Johor Baru. Therefore, we must focus on how to get everyone on the same page and establish a unified system for operations, particularly in public services accessible through a single platform.

I would like to see Irda play a role in guiding cooperation to create the agenda for Greater Johor Baru. The ultimate vision is to develop something akin to Greater London.

Retaining talent is important in Iskandar Malaysia. How can this issue be addressed?

The difference between places like Hong Kong and Shenzhen, and Johor and Singapore, lies in the currency. One has a small difference, while ours is 3.3 times that of Singapore. This creates a significant challenge for retaining talent in Johor.

I believe that if industries move in this direction under the JS-SEZ, we can see more jobs created here with a certain salary range. This will also help stimulate the local economy, as people will be earning and spending here. That's why we should view this as an opportunity; in addition to growing our SMEs, we must also consider how local businessmen and residents can benefit.

Now that the JS-SEZ has become a reality, what is Irda's role here and how will this impact investments in Iskandar Malaysia?

We have set up the Iskandar Malaysia Facilitation Centre Johor (IMFC-J) to assist investors. Located in Forest City, it is a one-stop centre that will have both state and federal officers on site.

As envisioned by Johor Mentri Besar Datuk Onn Hafiz Ghazi, IMFC-J will address the need for agencies to collaborate seamlessly rather than work in silos to ensure the success of the JS-SEZ.

Since the official launch of the IMFC-J by Johor Regent Tunku Ismail Ibni Sultan Ibrahim on Feb 18, we have received over 140 inquiries, 24 of whom are serious potential investors who could collectively invest RM11bil.

The JS-SEZ aims to attract 50 to 100 high-growth projects over the next five to 10 years. Besides facilitating foreign companies, we also support local players who want to expand here.

To date, Irda has assigned 15 staff members as account managers and frontliners to assist investors at IMFC-J. The office is managed by Invest Johor with the state government's support.

How do you prevent overlap in Irda's duties and roles within the JS-SEZ, or in incentives for new investors?

Incentives fall under the purview of Mida, the Finance Ministry and Bank Negara. Our role is solely to facilitate applications, so there is no issue of duplication. We collaborate closely with these agencies as IMFC-J involves three key parties: Invest Johor, Mida and Irda.

Mida represents the federal side while Invest Johor represents the state, and we operate at both federal and state levels. Our role is to facilitate and streamline processes for investors.

How will Irda reinvent itself to remain relevant, considering its initial goals when it was first set up in 2007?

Irda is top-heavy. We have about 150 staff members, but the lower tier comprises only a small percentage. I believe we must reevaluate and reposition some of our roles to be more strategic, allowing us to become thought leaders and advisors to the state and federal governments on strategic and investment decisions.

We must expand our roles beyond the secretariat for the Joint Ministerial Committee with Singapore. Value-adding activities should be 50% of our focus, while the remaining 50% should be dedicated to facilitating investments.

As the new CEO, what is your message to all Irda staff? Will it be business as usual or have you implemented any changes?

I have conducted my first town hall with the team. I want them to understand that Irda should become highly relevant again and earn the trust of agencies and the community, thus bringing real value to the local landscape. To achieve this, we need to reassess our internal roles and may need to reposition ourselves for new responsibilities. We are also bringing in the best people to be on the frontlines.

You have known Johor Ruler Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar for many years. How would you describe your relationship with him?

I believe this is a great time for Johor, especially since His Majesty is also the King of Malaysia. This is where Irda's role becomes crucial in bridging the relationship between the state and federal governments.

I have yet to meet Tuanku since taking over, but I greatly appreciated his support for MBJB when I was mayor. Tuanku is full of ideas and wants to see Johor not only develop further but also remain clean. Building on this, my relationship with Tunku Ismail, who is equally visionary, inspires me to meet his expectations.

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By NELSON BENJAMIN
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Reshaping Johor's landscape

SUNWAY Property prides itself on being a Master Community Developer in Johor, with two landmark projects along the two land borders with Singapore.

Sunway City Iskandar Puteri (SCIP) chief executive officer Gerard Soosay said this is an exciting time for both the company and state, driven by the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ) and the Rapid Transit System (RTS) Link connecting Bukit Chagar in Johor Baru to Woodlands North in Singapore.

"With these two projects, we have anchored our developments near the checkpoints in both Johor Baru and the Second Link, contributing to Johor Baru's transformation into an international gateway city," he said.

In Johor Baru, he added, this was achieved through its strategic partnership with MRT Corp to jointly develop an integrated mixed-use development on a 1.71ha site adjacent to the RTS Bukit Chagar station.

The company has been developing SCIP, an 809ha integrated township near the Second Link, since 2014. SCIP is modelled after Sunway City Kuala Lumpur, the flagship development of Sunway Group, one of the leading conglomerates in South-East Asia.

Gerard said the RTS mixed-use development in Johor Baru will include a five-star hotel along with three blocks of about 1,700 serviced apartment units.

"When people arrive from Singapore via the RTS, they will be greeted by around 400,000sq ft of retail, hospitality and wellness space," he said, adding that this partnership has a gross development value (GDV) of RM2.6bil.

Gerard (left) explaining the SCIP township concept to *The Star* news editor Nelson Benjamin. — THOMAS YONG/The Star

He said 30% of SCIP's total land bank has been utilised to date, with up to 7,000 residents calling it home. The ultimate goal is to house 200,000 residents upon the project's full completion.

"The township has become a prime residential destination in line with the growing number of Singaporeans and Malaysians working in Singapore. About 33% of our property buyers are Singaporeans or Malaysians who are working in Singapore," he said.

Unlike conventional plot developments, SCIP follows a unique build-own-operate model.

"This means that rather than just constructing buildings and selling them, Sunway retains ownership and manages key assets such as malls, hotels and offices.

"For us, integration is key," Gerard said, adding that Sunway envisions a thriving ecosystem where people can live, work, learn, play and stay in a safe, healthy and connected environment, in line with its status as a Master Community Developer and commitment to be "With You For Generations".

He said this approach informs SCIP's development strategy, which prioritises an educational institution as its first development.

Sunway International School, opened in 2017, attracts families seeking quality education for their children and has fostered a vibrant community.

"Sunway and the Jeffrey Cheah Foundation also gifted RM18mil to fund the construction of SJK(C) Cheah Fah, the first Chinese national-type primary school built in Johor in over 20 years, to cater to growing local demand.

"We opened the school in 2022 with 223 students. Now, we have over 700 students," he said.

Living up to the group's philosophy of "Doing Well by Doing Good", Gerard said they recently held a fundraising dinner for the school, raising RM6mil to add 18 more classrooms and increase its capacity to 1,400 students.

These developments align with the vision of Sunway Group founder and chairman Tan Sri Sir Dr Jeffrey Cheah, who established the Jeffrey Cheah Foundation to make quality education affordable and accessible to as many young people as possible.

The foundation is the largest of its kind advancing education in Malaysia, and has awarded more than RM745mil in scholarships and grants to date.

Gerard said they have also ventured into a Free Commercial Zone by jointly developing a 42.5ha site in the township with Singapore-based logistics company Equalbase.

"The Equalbase Sunway 103° project will involve five million square feet of warehousing space, a GDV of RM8bil and the potential to create 13,000 jobs," he added.

Looking ahead, he said SCIP will introduce new attractions, including a 4.5km Sunway Circuit that will establish SCIP as a regional hub of motoring tourism.

"The circuit is designed with high-end motor enthusiasts in mind, can accommodate over 400 members and offers state-of-the-art storage for their supercars.

"Suitable tracks are hard to come by for Singaporeans who own supercars. Our circuit will provide them with an exclusive, well-maintained venue that's just a short drive away," he added.

When asked if there are plans for a theme park, he said this is in the exploratory stages, especially after Johor Mentri Besar Datuk Onn Hafiz Ghazi announced that the state's entertainment tax would be lowered from 25% to 5% in perpetuity.

He said Sunway Healthcare Group is also poised to introduce a 300-bed tertiary hospital offering top notch diagnostic and treatment options in focus areas such as oncology. Plans are also underway for a senior living facility.

He said there is also a focus on green living within SCIP, incorporating extensive pedestrian walkways, elevated pathways and eco-friendly elements to champion the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The township was recently awarded two five-diamond recognitions from Malaysian Green Technology and Climate Change Corporation (MGTC) for its green master plan design, and their joint effort with the Iskandar Puteri City Council (MBIP) in developing a low-carbon city.

Daulat Tuanku

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By YEE XIANG YUN
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The Tokoh Johor Museum in Bukit Senyum, Johor Baru, which houses important information about the state's history and famous figures, is currently closed for renovations. The state aims to reopen it in conjunction with Visit Johor Year 2026 and International Museum Day.

A legacy forged by visionaries

JOHOR'S history is a rich tapestry woven by visionary leaders, dating back to the 16th century.

From the strategic rule of early sultans and leadership of iconic figures, their legacies continue to shape the state today.

Johor Heritage Foundation (YWJ) museum unit head Nor Alisa Abdul Rahman (*pic*) said one of the most prominent figures is Almarhum Sultan Abu Bakar Ibni Almarhum Temenggong Daeng Ibrahim, also known as the Father of Modern Johor.

"He played a significant role in developing a modern and advanced Johor, particularly its administration system – he formulated the Johor State Constitution in 1895, also known as Undang-Undang Tubuh Negeri Johor 1895.

"He also oversaw the establishment of police and armed forces in the state, as well as the construction of public facilities such as roads and infrastructure," she told *The Star* in an interview.

She said Sultan Abu Bakar also paved the way for diplomatic ties with countries such as England, Turkey, Egypt, China and Japan.

The Sultan strongly advocated for racial harmony and unity, said Nor Alisa, noting that the Ruler introduced the tagline "Muafakat Itu Berkat" (Consensus is a Blessing) to promote mutual respect and understanding.

"Such inclusive qualities, whether in state administration or education, were passed down until today," Nor Alisa added.

Current Johor Ruler Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar, who is also the 17th King of Malaysia, is a strong advocate for unity, often emphasising the importance of the Bangsa Johor concept.

Sultan Ibrahim has repeatedly reaffirmed the concept, stating that Johor's racial and religious diversity will always be recognised and respected.

"Sultan Ibrahim's vision as a Ruler has driven Johor's rapid growth, attracting foreign investors and developing a high-value property market while ensuring affordable housing for the people," Nor Alisa noted.

Here is a look at other prominent leaders who shaped Johor, according to YWJ's records.

One of the most prominent figures in the state's history, Sultan Abu Bakar is known as the Father of Modern Johor.

Tan made history as Johor's first Mejar Cina, the highest administrative title for a Chinese leader at the time.

Wong's construction expertise earned Sultan Abu Bakar's trust, leading him to shape Johor's infrastructure.

As modern Johor's first mentri besar, Jaafar played a vital role in the establishment of Johor's public administration system.

Datuk Jaafar Muhammad

Born in Telok Belanga, Singapore, Jaafar became modern Johor's first mentri besar in 1868. He was instrumental in shaping Johor's public administration system, playing a key role in driving its economic growth and infrastructure development.

Known for his integrity and deep sense of nationalism, he earned the respect of the British as a trustworthy and capable administrator.

Datuk Seri Amar Diraja Abdul Rahman Andak

One of the first Johoreans to receive his education in England, Abdul Rahman began his public service career in June 1878 as a clerk and translator at the Johor State Secretary's office.

He became State Secretary in 1893, coordinating diplomatic affairs between Johor and the British in Singapore and London.

He also advised Sultan Abu Bakar on matters related to international diplomacy and the formulation of the state constitution, which safeguarded the sovereignty of the royal family.

Wong Ah Fook

One of Johor's most prominent Chinese leaders, Wong left his home village of Yan Jin Cun in Guangdong, China, at the age of 17 to seek a better future in South-East Asia.

Upon arriving in 1854, he worked as a carpenter in Singapore before becoming a contractor and establishing a successful career in construction.

Wong later gained the trust of Sultan Abu Bakar, who commissioned him to build his palace in Iskandar Putri, as Johor Baru was known then. The palace plans were drawn up by an European architect.

In her book *Wong Ah Fook – Immigrant, Builder and Entrepreneur*, Wong's great-granddaughter Lim Pui Huen wrote that despite his youth, the contract to build Istana Besar spoke volumes about his skills and reputation.

The book highlighted the building materials sourced from various places: ceramic tiles from Europe, marble from Italy, roof tiles from China and fired bricks from Singapore.

An interesting detail about the palace's construction was the use of Madras chunam plaster, made from shell lime mixed with egg whites and coarse sugar.

The palace was officiated on Jan 1, 1866, coinciding with the renaming of Iskandar Putri to Johor Baru.

Wong was also tasked with constructing several other notable buildings, including the residence of Johor's first mentri besar in Bukit Senyum, as well as numerous public works related to maintaining buildings and improving town infrastructure.

Tan Hiok Nee

Born in 1810, Tan travelled to South-East Asia at the age of 17. He worked in Pahang and later traded textiles in Singapore.

Among his prominent and regular customers were Temenggong Daeng Ibrahim, the sovereign Ruler of Johor at the time, and his heir Tun Abu Bakar, who later became Sultan Abu Bakar.

As part of his efforts to develop Johor, Temenggong Daeng Ibrahim invited Chinese settlers to relocate to the state and cultivate land for pepper and gambier farming.

He also introduced the kangchu system, which allowed permit holders to collect taxes and govern Chinese communities along riverbanks.

With the Ruler's support, Tan relocated to Johor from Singapore and continued his business in Sungai Segget. Tan also obtained kangchu permits, granting him authority over the left side of Sungai Johor, from southern Kota Tinggi to Pulau Ubin.

When Tun Abu Bakar ascended the throne in 1868, Tan was appointed the first Mejar Cina, the highest position given to a Chinese in the Johor administration. The Mejar Cina title was later revived by Sultan Ibrahim in 2020.

In 1874, Tan was one of two Chinese members of the Johor state assembly. He was conferred the Sri Paduka Mahkota Johor award, bearing the title of Datuk.

Dr Samuel Nalliah Ponniah

Dr Samuel graduated from the University of Hong Kong and is a registered member of the Malaysian Medical Council. He has made significant contributions to the medical field and received various awards, including the Pingat Ibrahim Sultan Johor medal in 1990.

He has also demonstrated academic excellence and contributed to the advancement of medicine in Malaysia and beyond.

Nor Alisa highlighted other notable Johor figures such as footballer Abdullah Mohd Don, nicknamed "Harimau Malaya" for his performance on the field, and politician Tun Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman, who held various ministerial posts, including deputy prime minister (1970 to 1973).

"Information on the state's history and figures will once again be on display at the Tokoh Johor Museum in the city once renovations are completed next year.

"We aim to reopen it in conjunction with Visit Johor Year 2026 and International Museum Day, so the public can learn more and develop a deeper appreciation for the state," she said.

Daulat Tuanku

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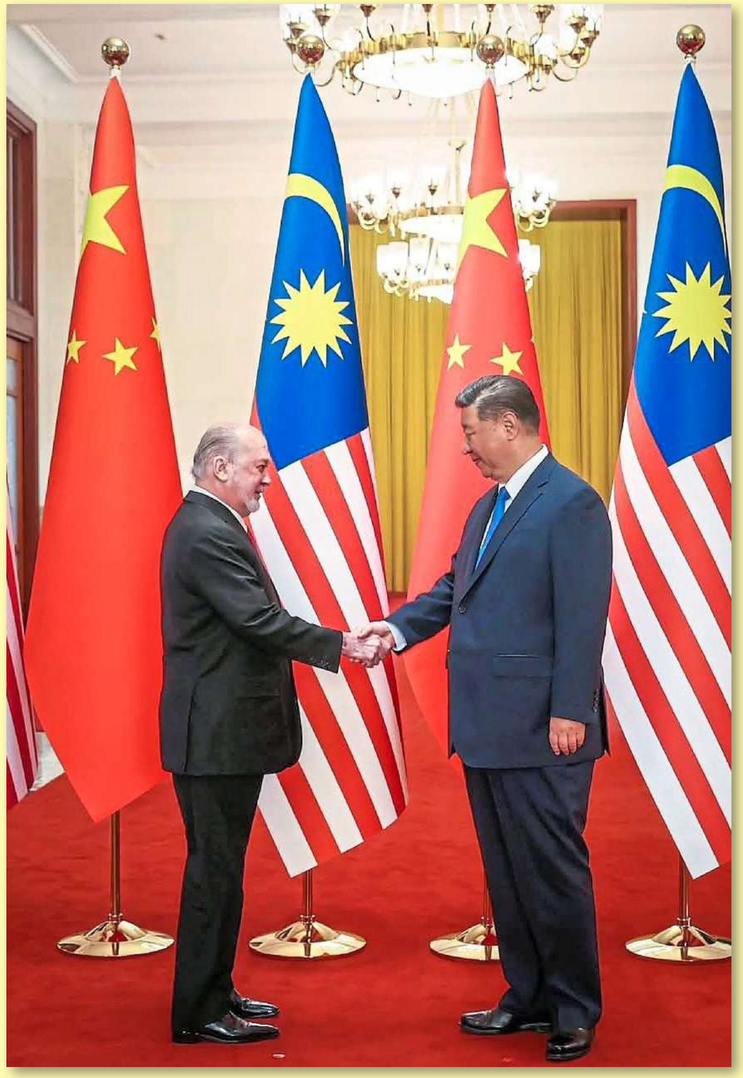
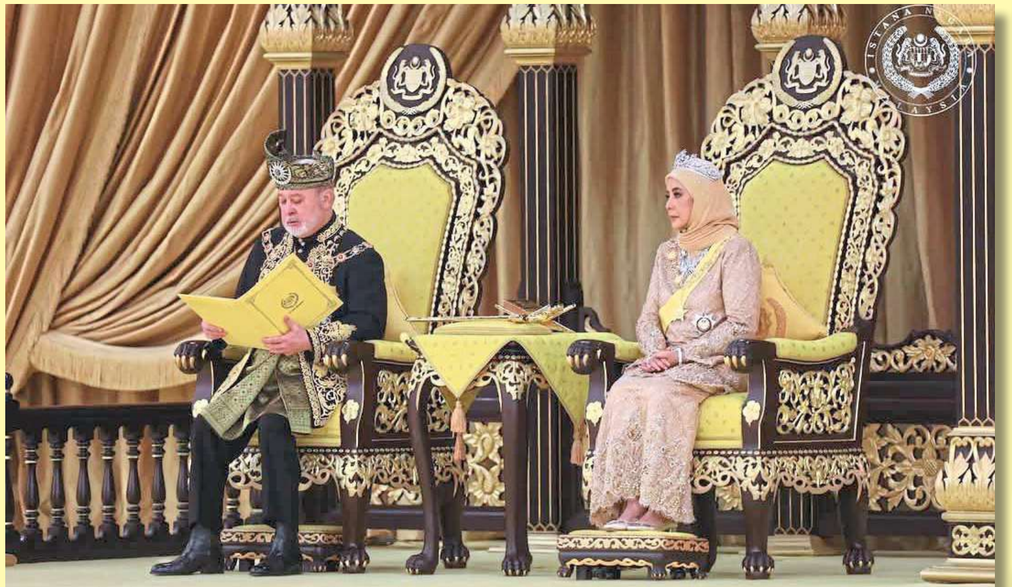


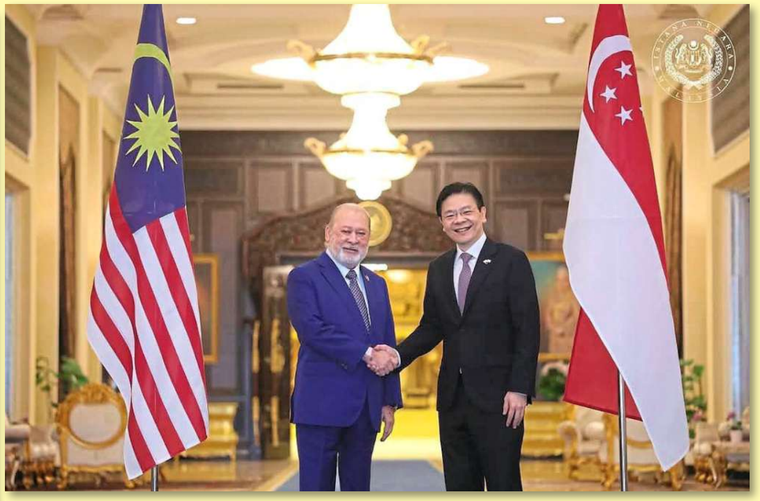
Sultan Ibrahim greeting Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China, as part of His Majesty's four-day visit in September last year.



Sultan Ibrahim giving a decree as the King of Malaysia after His Majesty's installation at Istana Negara, Kuala Lumpur, in July 2024. Permaisuri Johor Raja Zarith Sofiah Binti Almarhum Sultan Idris Shah was also installed as the Queen of Malaysia.
— All photos taken from Sultan Ibrahim's official Facebook page

Ruling with care and compassion

Johor Ruler Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar is cherished by the rakyat for his caring nature and active involvement in community affairs. Through his leadership, His Majesty inspires unity and pride across Johor.



Sultan Ibrahim shaking hands with Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong after granting him an audience at Dewan Seri Mahkota, Istana Negara, in January this year.

Sultan Ibrahim and Raja Zarith Sofiah taking an MRT ride from the Springleaf station to the Woodlands North station during their two-day state visit to Singapore in May last year.

Patrons at a coffee shop in Tanjung Piai, Pontian, greeting the Ruler during his surprise visit there for breakfast in January this year.

Sultan Ibrahim visiting flood victims sheltering at a relief centre in Kota Tinggi in January this year.

(Clockwise, from top left) Sultan Ibrahim interacting with the public after enjoying nasi lemak with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in Kuala Lumpur in January this year; the Ruler sharing a tender moment with his grandchildren last November; Sultan Ibrahim taking time off to play football with his staff members.

(Right) Lee serving customers at his restaurant in Johor Baru. — THOMAS YONG/The Star

(Below) Photos of Sultan Ibrahim's visits adorn the walls of Hassan's restaurant in Muar.

Royal visits turn eateries into hotspots

Janaki serving thosai near a poster with photos of Sultan Ibrahim's visit to her stall in Kulai.

By VENESA DEVI
venesa@thestar.com.my

HASSAN Daud thought it would be just another typical day but upon opening the doors to his restaurant, he was surprised to find a special guest – none other than Johor Ruler Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar.

Recounting his first encounter with Sultan Ibrahim from over two decades ago, Hassan said he was shocked to see His Majesty standing outside his shop in the wee hours of the morning.

"It was still very early, probably around 6am, and Sultan Ibrahim was already outside, waiting for me to open my shop.

"I remember His Majesty asking me, 'Dah siap ke belum?' (Are you done yet?) the moment I came outside.

"I was not expecting such a special visit that morning. I was nervous at first, but His Majesty's down-to-earth personality put me at ease," said the 66-year-old.

Hassan said Sultan Ibrahim has since become a regular customer, often dropping by the restaurant along Jalan Maharani in Muar in the early hours of the morning.

"Once, His Majesty even cycled here from Istana Muar, which is about 2km away from my shop.

"I admire His Majesty's humility. Despite being Johor's Ruler, Sultan Ibrahim has no issue coming here on a bicycle.

"His Majesty has also never asked me to close my shop whenever he comes here," said Hassan, who has been running his business for over 30 years.

He added that Sultan Ibrahim often takes the time to connect with his subjects during his trips to the restaurant.

"The Sultan is a Ruler who truly cares for his people and genuinely wants to know how they are doing.

"I have had the opportunity to talk to His Majesty a few times, and among the things he often asks me is whether my business is doing well," he said.

According to Hassan, Sultan Ibrahim often orders roti canai and mutton biryani with iced ginger water without milk and sugar.

"His Majesty's visits made my restaurant popular and I'm very grateful for that," he said.

He added that His Majesty's last visit was before his installation as the 17th King of Malaysia last year.

Meanwhile, Lee Wen Hao, the third-generation owner of a famous asam pedas restaurant in Johor Baru, said he was honoured to serve Sultan Ibrahim.

"Sultan Ibrahim has been coming here since His Majesty was young, especially during his years as the Tunku Mahkota of Johor.

> **We are truly grateful for His Majesty's visit. It was a very special and unforgettable moment for us.**
>
> LEE WEN HAO

"However, we had not received a visit from His Majesty since he became the Johor Sultan as his life became busier with more responsibilities to fulfil as the state Ruler.

"We never expected Sultan Ibrahim to visit now that His Majesty is the King of Malaysia and has the entire country to look after.

"We are truly grateful for His Majesty's visit. It was a very special and unforgettable moment for us," he said, referring to Sultan Ibrahim's visit with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, which went viral last year.

The 30-year-old, who has seen Sultan Ibrahim dining at his family's restaurant since he was a young boy, described His Majesty as a down-to-earth and humble person.

"Despite being the King of Malaysia, His Majesty's character remains unchanged – he is still as humble as ever.

"Serving someone so important can be nerve-wracking, but His Majesty's down-to-earth nature puts us at ease," Lee said, adding that Sultan Ibrahim usually orders asam pedas fish, squid and bean sprouts.

He said other members of the Johor royal family, particularly Johor Regent Tunku Ismail Sultan Ibrahim, also frequent the restaurant.

"They are our loyal customers who come here to eat once or twice a week," he said.

For 42-year-old stall owner R. Janaki, a single visit from the beloved Ruler almost a decade ago is a memory that she will cherish forever.

"Sultan Ibrahim visited my stall during the Kembara Mahkota Johor programme in 2016. It was a short but very meaningful visit that my family and I will always remember.

"During the visit, His Majesty even tried his hand at making thosai and was surprisingly pretty skilled at it.

"We thought that we would need to show him how it is done first, but His Majesty seemed to already know what to do," Janaki said.

Janaki, who sells traditional Indian delicacies in Kulai, said Sultan Ibrahim spent about 10 minutes making a perfectly shaped thosai.

"His Majesty got the shape right on his first try without any assistance from anyone, which I think was very impressive," she said.

The mother of two described Sultan Ibrahim as a friendly and down-to-earth Ruler who was easy to talk to.

"I asked if we could have a family photo with him, and not only was His Majesty happy to do so, but His Majesty was also willing to wait for me to get my children, who were not at the stall then.

"My children, about five and nine years old at the time, were excited to take photos with Sultan Ibrahim as they had only seen him on television before that," she added.

Janaki, who is the second-generation owner of the food stall at Jalan Besar Kulai, said Sultan Ibrahim's visit helped boost the stall's popularity.

"Previously, only those from Kulai or nearby areas would frequent my stall.

"However, after his visit, I had people coming from as far as Singapore, Penang, Kuala Lumpur and other states just to try the dishes here," Janaki said, adding that the stall has been around since 1985.

Daulat Tuanku

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Historical finds earn royal praise

By MOHD FARHAAN SHAH
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EXPLORER Mohd Faris Johari has amassed thousands of artefacts over the years, but a gift from Johor Ruler Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar remains his most treasured possession.

The 37-year-old recounted how late last year, he and his team received a once-in-a-lifetime invitation to meet His Majesty personally at Istana Danga in Johor Baru.

"A palace official told me that our King wanted to meet me because of my passion for finding historical artefacts that tell the story of Johor's illustrious history.

"I will never forget meeting Sultan Ibrahim with my team on Dec 5, 2024. To this day, I still cherish that moment," Mohd Faris said when met at his public gallery at a shopping mall in Johor Baru.

He said four members of his 10-man team accompanied him to the audience, adding that they arrived at the palace grounds at around 9.30am.

"All of us wore proper attire, including suits, ties, long pants and songkok.

"We brought along old photographs of Johor Baru to show how the state's capital city has developed over the years, along with other artefacts to present to Sultan Ibrahim," he recalled.

As Mohd Faris and his team were arranging the artefacts they brought, a palace official called his name at around 10am and instructed him to wait in a living room.

"At first, I wasn't nervous at all. However, the moment Sultan Ibrahim entered the room and I kissed His Majesty's hand as a sign of respect, I suddenly felt nervous and jittery.

"I kept stuttering and struggling to get my words out. I was worried that Sultan Ibrahim might become annoyed with me and cut our meeting short.

"However, to my surprise, His Majesty walked toward me, placed his hand on my left shoulder and told me to relax, assuring me that it was just a normal conversation," he said.

Mohd Faris explained that he was taken aback by His Majesty's kind gesture, especially when he cracked jokes, as he had always seen Sultan Ibrahim as a very serious and no-nonsense individual.

He said that Sultan Ibrahim's kind words made him feel calmer and they began discussing Johor's history, particularly sites within Kota Tinggi.

"What was supposed to be a 10-minute audience turned into an hour-long conversation, as we talked about history and the many historical locations around Johor.

"My team and I are explorers. We venture into forest areas, along riverbanks and even enter abandoned tunnels, searching for artefacts in the hope of learning more about our past.

"To my surprise, during our conversation, Sultan Ibrahim knew every place my team had visited over the years, including the tunnels. His Majesty even knew the exact details of these locations," he added.

Mohd Faris said it is clear that Sultan Ibrahim knows every corner of Johor like the back of his hand, which shows how knowledgeable and caring the King is towards the state.

After discussing Johor's historical sites, Sultan Ibrahim asked the explorer about the artefacts he had on display at his gallery.

"His Majesty asked if I charged visitors a fee to view the artefacts. There is no set fee; visitors can donate any amount they wish.

"Sultan Ibrahim also asked if anyone had offered me money to purchase the artefacts I've collected over the years," he said.

Mohd Faris explained to His Majesty that he had received many offers, notably for a rare set of train keys used between the Woodlands and Johor Baru stations.

"However, I told Sultan Ibrahim that despite the generous offers, I have no intention of selling these rare artefacts, as they are valuable pieces of Johor's history.

"His Majesty gave his blessing to me and my team, encouraging us to continue our efforts in exploring Johor and uncovering more historical artefacts.

"The King also reminded us that any artefacts we discover in Johor must remain in the state and should not be sold to third parties, especially those claiming to represent Sultan Ibrahim," he said.

Mohd Faris added that as the audience was about to conclude, Sultan Ibrahim called for a palace official to bring something from another room.

To the team's surprise, His Majesty presented each member with various gifts, including a wristwatch featuring the Johor Sultan emblem, a coat pin, a signed Johor Sultan coronation book, and signed coin and stamp collections celebrating Sultan Ibrahim's coronation as the 17th King of Malaysia.

"His Majesty told us that not everyone he meets receives such gifts. Sultan Ibrahim also advised us to wear the coat pin, which bears his picture, during official functions.

"His Majesty stated that the coat pin is only given to government officials and we should always treasure it," he said, adding that he and his team would always cherish the gifts.

Mohd Faris said that he displayed some of the items in his gallery and as expected, collectors expressed interest in purchasing the signed Sultan Ibrahim memorabilia.

"Following His Majesty's advice, these items and other artefacts displayed in my gallery will never be for sale.

"We are truly grateful for the opportunity to meet Sultan Ibrahim in person," Mohd Faris added.

Mohd Faris showing the gifts he received during his audience with Sultan Ibrahim. (Inset) A closer look at the coat pin and case containing the wristwatch. — Photos by THOMAS YONG/The Star

(Above) Mohd Faris (left) showing visitor Borhan Samyon a book and plate commemorating the marriage between Sultan Ibrahim and Permaisuri Johor Raja Zarith Sofiah Binti Almarhum Sultan Idris Shah, at the Johor Historical Gallery in Johor Baru. (Right) Mohd Faris looking at a vintage train key set.

Daulat Tuanku

Mengadap

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Paving a sustainable path

By ZAZALI MUSA
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MAH Sing Group Bhd (Mah Sing) is well positioned to capitalise on the transformative opportunities offered by the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ).

Designed to boost economic activity, attract investments and establish Johor as a hub for innovation and development, the JS-SEZ paves the way for robust growth in the region.

Meridin East stands as one of Johor's largest integrated townships, spanning over 1,313 acres. — Photo courtesy of Mah Sing

(Inset) Leong

Strategic leadership in Johor

"The JS-SEZ is a transformative initiative for Johor and Malaysia as a whole," said Mah Sing founder and group managing director Tan Sri Leong Hoy Kum.

"Having operated in Johor since 2000, we've long recognised the region's immense potential."

Leong said that in 2024, the group acquired six parcels of land with a total gross development value (GDV) of RM5.8bil, of which three were in Johor, contributing RM3.4bil in GDV.

He stated that with its diverse portfolio of developments – including the landmark M Grand Minori, located just 3km from the Johor Baru-Singapore Rapid Transit System (RTS) Link – Mah Sing is poised to drive Johor's transformation into a key economic hub.

"Our commitment to Johor remains strong and we are continuously seeking new opportunities to expand our land bank for townships, industrial projects, and M Series developments," added Leong.

Beyond M Grand Minori, Mah Sing's flagship projects in Johor – M Tiara 2 and Meridin East – are poised to strengthen Mah Sing's growth trajectory and provide earnings visibility from the Southern corridor.

M Tiara 2, spanning 100.4 acres of freehold land between the established townships of Mutiara Rini and Lima Kedai, boasts a GDV of RM1.45bil.

It features an array of double-storey linked homes, serviced apartments, and double-storey shops designed for home upgraders, Malaysian professionals working in Singapore and foreign buyers.

Positioned as an upgraded version of its predecessor, M Tiara 2 emphasises low-density living and enhanced lifestyle offerings.

Meridin East, meanwhile, stands as one of Johor's largest integrated townships, spanning over 1,313 acres.

With its sustainable design, abundant green spaces and excellent connectivity via the Senai-Desaru Expressway and Pasir Gudang Highway, it appeals to families and suburban dwellers seeking quality and eco-friendly living.

Together, M Tiara 2, Meridin East and M Grand Minori underscore Mah Sing's strategic vision of aligning with Johor's economic momentum. To date, Mah Sing has delivered approximately 17,000 units of residential, commercial and industrial developments in Johor, which remains its second-largest market after the Klang Valley.

Incentives powering growth under JS-SEZ

The JS-SEZ introduces groundbreaking initiatives that directly benefit Mah Sing's operations.

The Invest Malaysia Facilitation Centre–Johor (IMFC-J) serves as a one-stop centre, simplifying approvals and speeding up processes to create an investor-friendly environment. These initiatives boost investor confidence and position the region to attract significant foreign direct investment.

The introduction of Enhanced Passes, including the DE Rantau Nomad Pass, strengthens the JS-SEZ's appeal by attracting global talent and digital nomads.

The initiative enriches the workforce diversity with the JS-SEZ, creating a dynamic ecosystem that benefits industrial and commercial developments.

These measures align with Mah Sing's goal of delivering innovative industrial and commercial products that meet the evolving needs of businesses, professionals and expatriates, while contributing to the region's economic growth and competitiveness.

Complementing these initiatives are tax holidays and fast-track approvals, which lower operational costs and accelerate project timelines.

Relaxed foreign investment restrictions further attract international capital, spurring innovation and demand for properties.

Sustainability incentives such as support for green building certifications resonate with Mah Sing's eco-conscious development ethos, enhancing the value and appeals of its projects.

"With the IMFC-J facilitating seamless investments and Enhanced Passes fostering a vibrant global workforce, the JS-SEZ creates a thriving ecosystem for economic growth.

"Mah Sing is well positioned to leverage these opportunities and deliver innovative developments that meet the rising demand for quality residential and commercial properties," Leong said.

Looking ahead

The JS-SEZ's emphasis on connectivity, economic vibrancy and rising wages is expected to fuel strong housing demand.

As employment opportunities expand, Mah Sing anticipates attracting a diverse mix of professionals, families and expatriates to Johor.

By adopting a phase development approach, Mah Sing ensures its projects are tailored to real-time market needs while maintaining sustainable growth.

Mah Sing remains committed to contributing to the JS-SEZ's vision of creating a dynamic and sustainable economic zone that benefits communities, businesses and the nation.

Daulat Tuanku

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YANG DI-PERTUAN AGONG

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

Johor on track for rail transformation

By MOHD FARHAAN SHAH
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The newly constructed Kulai train station is part of the Gemas-Johor Baru Electrified Double Track Rail Project (Gemas-JB EDTP). A total of 11 new train stations have been built in Johor for this project. — THOMAS YONG/The Star

JOHOR is set to become a major rail hub in Malaysia within the next few years, enhancing connectivity and driving economic development in the state.

State works, transportation, infrastructure and communication committee chairman Mohamad Fazli Mohamad Salleh said two ongoing rail projects in Johor are on track for completion.

"The first is the Gemas-Johor Baru Electrified Double Track Rail Project (Gemas-JB EDTP), which officially began construction in January 2018.

"This project aims to upgrade the existing single-track railway between Gemas and Johor Baru to a double-track electrified system, spanning approximately 192km and covering key districts such as Segamat, Kluang, Kulai and Johor Baru," he added.

Mohamad Fazli said the project is on track for completion by the third quarter of this year and is expected to enhance connectivity while driving economic growth in the region.

He said the Gemas-JB EDTP will complement the Electric Train Service (ETS), which runs from Padang Besar in Perlis to Gemas in Negri Sembilan.

"The Segamat station is the first station in Johor to become operational since March 15, and other stations along the route will follow suit before the final stop at JB Sentral.

"There are 11 stops along its 192km route between Gemas and Johor Baru, covering districts such as Segamat, Kluang and Kulai," he added.

The 11 stations are Segamat, Genuang, Labis, Bekok, Paloh, Kluang, Mengkibol, Renggam, Layang-Layang, Kulai and Kempas Baru.

It will reduce travel time between Johor Baru and Kuala Lumpur to four and a half hours from the previous seven hours.

Mohamad Fazli noted that the Gemas-JB EDTP project would greatly benefit locals by enhancing connectivity between cities and reducing travel time.

"With this service, users will enjoy a faster, more comfortable and more efficient journey from Johor Baru to Gemas, along with direct connections to Kuala Lumpur and other destinations in Peninsular Malaysia.

"The Gemas-JB EDTP will be a catalyst in positioning Johor as a rail hub in Malaysia, as the state government aims to fully utilise the double-track railway for the benefit of the people," he said.

Mohamad Fazli said the state government had observed that the ETS running on the double track would not have consistent ridership along its route.

"We want to fully optimise the double rail track by introducing a commuter service that connects Paloh to JB Sentral, as well as Kulai to JB Sentral," he added.

Mohamad Fazli said the commuter service will use the same rail track as the Gemas-JB EDTP and is expected to be introduced by 2027 or 2028.

He added that introducing a commuter service is part of the government's strategy to reduce traffic congestion in Johor Baru, providing the public with more transportation options.

"Having a commuter service will help support the Rapid Transit System Link (RTS Link) which connects Johor Baru and Singapore, allowing the public to use buses, taxis and now, the commuter service, when heading to or from the city area," Mohamad Fazli said.

Mohamad Fazli said Johor is poised to become a major rail hub in Malaysia.

Syarul Izam said Forest City is looking forward to participating in major projects like the Kuala Lumpur-Singapore HSR.

"With this in mind, the state government wants to fully optimise the double rail track by introducing a commuter service that able to connect Paloh and JB Sentral as well as Kulai and JB Sentral."

He added that daily cross-border travel between Johor and Singapore via the Causeway and Second Link currently ranges between 300,000 and 400,000 people.

"With the Malaysian government's new single immigration clearance system now in place at Bangunan Sultan Iskandar and Kompleks Sultan Abu Bakar, movement between Malaysia and Singapore has become more efficient, leveraging facial recognition, QR codes as well as passport verification for faster processing.

"The RTS Link, connecting Bukit Chagar in Johor Baru to Woodlands North in Singapore, is set to be a game-changer," he said.

Mohamad Fazli added that the RTS is scheduled for completion by the end of 2026 and will be fully operational by Jan 1, 2027, accommodating up to 10,000 passengers per trip.

He also said that discussions are underway to introduce a single immigration clearance system for the RTS to facilitate smoother cross-border movement between both countries.

The Bukit Pasir assemblyman stated that as part of efforts to ease traffic congestion in Johor Baru, particularly with the RTS nearing completion, an elevated Automated Rapid Transit (E-ART) system has been proposed for the city.

"The state government is considering the E-ART system along three key corridors – Iskandar Puteri, Skudai and Tebrau – with the Iskandar Puteri line.

"Several companies have expressed interest in bidding for the E-ART project, with the Transport Ministry and the Public-Private Partnership Unit currently finalising the work scope before opening the bidding process.

"The state government is hopeful that the E-ART project will commence soon, especially as the RTS Link remains on track for completion next year.

"Together with the Gemas-JB EDTP, RTS Link, commuter service and hopefully the E-ART, Johor will be recognised as a rail hub in the country," Mohamad Fazli added.

Meanwhile, Forest City is strengthening its role as a major transportation hub in southern Johor, supporting the growth of the Special Financial Zone (SFZ) and the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ).

As part of its long-term strategy, Forest City aims to expand beyond its existing road network by incorporating rail connectivity to enhance accessibility and economic integration in the region.

Country Garden Pacificview Sdn Bhd Deputy President Syarul Izam Sarifudin said that with major rail projects such as the Kuala Lumpur-Singapore High-Speed Rail (HSR) and Johor Baru's proposed E-ART system under discussion, Forest City is positioning itself as a key player in the region's evolving transportation landscape.

"Whether it's the highly anticipated revival of the HSR or the proposed development of the E-ART in Johor Baru, government agencies are working to advance these projects.

"Forest City looks forward to participating in these initiatives," he said.

An aerial view of the Rapid Transit System (RTS) Link, which will connect Johor Baru to Singapore. The project is on schedule for completion by the end of 2026.

Daulat Tuanku

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Driving smart city transformation

By REMAR NORDIN
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LOCAL councils play a key role in ensuring the state's progress and transformation efforts, with four major councils leading the way under the Greater Johor Baru initiative.

The four councils which play a crucial role in shaping the region's future are Johor Baru City Council (MBJB), Iskandar Puteri City Council (MBIP), Pasir Gudang City Council (MBPG) and Kulai Municipal Council (MPKu).

Through innovative technologies, strategic investments and sustainability-driven policies, these councils are setting new benchmarks for urban living.

MBJB mayor Datuk Mohd Haffiz Ahmad reaffirmed the city's commitment to becoming a leading smart city, a vision set by the Johor Menteri Besar.

"With the completion of 500 AI-powered CCTV installations in 2024, we are now integrating several systems into the Johor Baru Integrated Operations Command Centre (JBIOCC), including a geographic information system, flood monitoring and a complaints system," he said.

"Once completed, this system will enhance monitoring and response times, making the city more efficient."

In preparation for the Rapid Transit System (RTS) Link service launching in 2027, MBJB is enhancing public transportation infrastructure to address anticipated parking shortages in the city centre.

"If we do not provide adequate facilities, commuters may overcrowd the Johor Baru City Centre before using the RTS," Mohd Haffiz explained.

"That's why we introduced the JB Smart Bus Stop project, integrating digital features and a mobile application to improve the commuting experience."

He added that MBJB has allocated RM1.2mil to upgrade bus stops with smart elements such as digital information boards, Wi-Fi and smart poles.

The council is also pushing for greater digitalisation in government services through the Johor Fastlane initiative.

"Our goal is to speed up application processing and enable digital transactions, allowing residents to manage business matters from their own premises," Mohd Haffiz added.

Recognising the need for sustainability, MBJB has formed nine committees to oversee Sustainable Development Goals initiatives.

"We aim to instil a sense of responsibility among residents to live sustainably, recycle and stop littering.

"Every year, we spend millions cleaning up rivers and beaches, collecting around 60 tonnes of waste monthly. This must change and we need the public to stand with us," he said.

Meanwhile, MBIP mayor Ahmad Nazir Mohd Nasir highlighted the city's pioneering role in climate action.

"Through the Iskandar Puteri Climate Action Plan (Ipcap) 2030 and the Iskandar Puteri Low Carbon Community (IPRK) platform, we are aligning with global sustainability standards while mobilising the community," he said.

MBJB has allocated RM1.2mil to upgrade bus stops with smart elements such as digital information boards, Wi-Fi and smart poles.

(Inset) MBJB mayor Mohd Haffiz

MBIP's Low Carbon Society Action Plan targets a 44% reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by focusing on waste, transportation, residential and industrial sectors.

(Inset) MBIP mayor Ahmad Nazir

To promote sustainability, MBPG has launched large-scale tree-planting projects, renewable energy initiatives and waste reduction campaigns.

(Inset) MBPG mayor Mustaffa Kamal

MPKu is implementing digital initiatives such as smart traffic lights, smart street lighting and an integrated command centre.

(Inset) MPKu president Mohd Hafiz

He added that since 2015, Iskandar Puteri has been implementing its Low Carbon Society Action Plan, targeting a 44% reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by focusing on waste management, transportation, residential and industrial sectors.

"With Ipcap 2030, we aim to reduce carbon dioxide emissions intensity by 63% by 2030 and achieve net-zero by 2050," Ahmad Nazir said.

"This plan prioritises energy, transport and waste management while addressing climate adaptation needs such as flood prevention and heatwave mitigation."

Key projects include the Green Building Index-certified MBIP headquarters, the Low Carbon Zone in Sunway City Iskandar Puteri and the Net Zero Carbon CBD in Medini.

"We are expanding electric vehicle (EV) adoption, installing solar-powered streetlights and promoting cycling lanes to encourage green mobility," he said.

Education also plays a central role, with MBIP supporting environmental awareness programmes such as the Iskandar Malaysia Ecolife Challenge (Imelc).

"By involving schools and local communities, we ensure that sustainability efforts are passed on to future generations," Ahmad Nazir added.

MBPG mayor Datuk Mustaffa Kamal Shamsudin underscored the city's commitment to becoming a prosperous, smart and low-carbon urban centre.

"Our focus is on providing high-quality infrastructure, maintaining cleanliness and ensuring public safety.

"We are enhancing road infrastructure, upgrading public spaces and rolling out digital initiatives for a more efficient administration," he said.

MBPG has installed 340 CCTV cameras across the city to enhance security and traffic monitoring.

"These CCTVs are integrated into our command centre, ensuring real-time monitoring and quick response to incidents," Mustaffa Kamal added.

To promote sustainability, MBPG has launched large-scale tree-planting projects, renewable energy initiatives and waste reduction campaigns.

"Through extensive recycling programmes and community education, we hope to instil a culture of environmental responsibility.

"Achieving a low-carbon city requires collective effort, and we are committed to working with all stakeholders to make Pasir Gudang a model for sustainability," he added.

Kulai Municipal Council (MPKu) president Mohd Hafiz Aliman highlighted the economic boost brought by the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ).

"Since 2022, investments worth RM52bil have been approved through the Kulai Fast Lane initiative.

"With the introduction of Johor Super Lane, we aim to attract even more investors to Johor and Kulai," he said.

To develop a smart and sustainable urban environment, MPKu is implementing digital initiatives such as smart traffic lights, smart street lighting as well as an integrated command centre.

"We have launched pilot projects in Bandar Putra and Indahpura, incorporating smart bins, digital licensing systems and IoT-driven monitoring," Mohd Hafiz stated.

Kulai is also home to South-East Asia's largest fast-charging EV hub, with 500 charging stations installed at Johor Premium Outlets.

"This supports the transition to electric mobility and aligns with future urban transportation trends," he added.

Additionally, MPKu is developing a Digital Twin system for real-time urban planning and infrastructure monitoring.

"With partnerships across multiple agencies, we are ensuring that data-driven decision-making shapes the city's future.

"Through strategic planning and strong collaboration, we are confident that Kulai will emerge as a leading smart city in Johor," Mohd Hafiz added.

The efforts of the four councils under the Greater Johor Baru initiative showcase a comprehensive approach to urban development, sustainability and smart city advancements.

From AI-driven monitoring in Johor Baru to climate action in Iskandar Puteri, public welfare in Pasir Gudang and smart infrastructure in Kulai, these local councils are setting the stage for a modern, resilient and future-ready Johor.

Daulat Tuanku

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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 2025 Bersamaan 22 Ramadan 1446 Hijrah

Dengan Segala Hormat Takzimnya
Yang Berdatang Sembah

Pengurusan dan Warga Kerja

SWM ENVIRONMENT

Ensuring a cleaner, greener Johor

By ZAZALI MUSA
metro@thestar.com.my

SWM Environment Sdn Bhd (SWM Environment) plays an important role in ensuring the success of the Johor Bersih (Clean Johor) agenda introduced by the state government.

Its corporate general manager Mohd Norlisam Mohd Nordin said Johor SWM Environment is committed to continuously improving its services through close collaboration with relevant agencies, namely the state government agencies, the Housing and Local Government Ministry, Solid Waste Management and Public Cleansing Corporation (SWCorp) and local authorities.

"We will ensure sufficient vehicles for cleaning-related purposes to match Johor's rapid development," he said.

Mohd Norlisam said the company has a fleet of vehicles including compactor lorries, suction lorries and road sweeper lorries to carry out solid waste management and public cleaning works according to schedule.

"We have taken proactive steps by setting up a special action team," he said.

Mohd Norlisam explained that the team's role is to add value to public cleaning efforts and address public complaints promptly in line with the goals of the Johor Bersih agenda.

He added that the company will also focus on improving the presence of City Centre Unit personnel in tourist attractions such as Johor Baru and Muar in preparation for Visit Johor Year 2026.

"Cleaning workers are the heart of SWM Environment's services with more than 5,000 members in Johor having served for over two decades," said Mohd Norlisam.

He explained that the government, through SWCorp, introduced the Malaysian Skills Certification Programme to change public perception of the waste management profession.

The programme also creates opportunities for workers to acquire skilled roles in the solid waste management and public cleaning sectors.

"Apart from creating skilled employment opportunities, we also emphasise developing a generation that is aware of sustainable waste management methods," said Mohd Norlisam.

He said ensuring environmental sustainability is done through Communication, Education and Public Awareness (Cepa) programmes and initiatives for students in Johor.

This initiative is implemented in collaboration with the Johor Education Department which supports sustainable waste management practices such as solid waste separation at the source as well as 3R Practices (Reduce, Reuse and Recycle).

Norhaniza (holding a poster), teachers and pupils of SK Simpang Renggam posing for a picture during a programme promoting the elimination of single-use plastics. — Photo courtesy of SWM Environment

Some of the programmes implemented are the Iskandar Malaysia Ecolife Challenge (Imelc), Sustainability Education Programme and Schools Recycling Competition (PerKISS).

Among the many professionals at the forefront of Johor cleaning efforts is Amran Jamal. An SWM Environment compactor lorry driver, he is responsible for ensuring the smooth collection of solid waste in Johor Baru, Iskandar Puteri and Kulai areas.

"It gives me satisfaction serving the community to ensure that their surroundings remain clean and free from garbage overflow, especially during festive seasons," said the 58-year-old Johor Baru native, who has been a compactor lorry driver since 1997.

Amran said improvements to the compactor lorry have had a significant impact on solid waste management services, including an increase in load capacity of up to 15 tonnes per trip.

Meanwhile, SK Simpang Renggam headmaster Norhaniza Hasham@Hisam gave a thumbs-up to the sustainable waste management practices implemented through the Cepa programme and sustainability education.

"The practices at school level not only create early awareness among the younger generation, but also support efforts towards a cleaner and more sustainable Johor," she said.

SK Simpang Renggam received recognition as a KITARecyle Icon School from SWM Environment in conjunction with Imelc 2024.

SWM Environment has been providing solid waste management and public cleaning services in Johor, Melaka and Negri Sembilan for over 25 years, with a workforce of 9,000 people.

■ For more information, visit *www.swmenvironment.com*

Daulat Tuanku

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KEBAWAH DULI YANG MAHA MULIA
SULTAN IBRAHIM
SULTAN YANG DIPERTUAN BAGI NEGERI DAN JAJAHAN TAKLUK JOHOR DARUL TA'ZIM
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PENGERUSI DAN AHLI-AHLI
JOHORE PLANTERS' ASSOCIATION
PERSATUAN PENANAM-PENANAM JOHOR

Daulat Tuanku

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

Birthday wishes for a beloved Ruler

Johoreans from every corner of the state come together to celebrate and extend heartfelt birthday wishes to their beloved Ruler, Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar, who also serves as the 17th King of Malaysia.

"Warmest birthday wishes to His Majesty. May His Majesty be blessed with good health, longevity and prosperity. Thank you for your unwavering belief in Bangsa Johor, a unifying spirit that brings us all together. Daulat Tuanku!"

R. Chitra, 46,
Personal assistant, Kulai

"On behalf of the people of Mersing, Johor, I would like to extend my warmest birthday wishes to Sultan Ibrahim. I wish His Majesty a day filled with joy, blessings and continued prosperity. May His Majesty also be blessed with good health, happiness and continued wisdom in leading our beloved nation."

Yanti Suhaila Abu Samah, 37,
Wedding planner and restaurant owner, Mersing

"Wishing His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia and Sultan of Johor, a joyous birthday filled with blessings, prosperity and peace. His Majesty is a compassionate leader who continuously promotes unity among Johoreans. May His Majesty bring Malaysia and Johor to greater heights in social, economic and political stability. Daulat Tuanku!"

Chan Weng Yeap, 30,
Credit analyst, Segamat

"Sultan Ibrahim is a caring and compassionate Ruler who has always put the people first. His Majesty is also a very open-minded person who never looks at race or religion. May His Majesty continue to be blessed with good health."

N. Geeva, 44,
Businessman, Kluang

"I would like to extend my warmest wishes to our beloved Johor Ruler Sultan Ibrahim. May His Majesty's reign continue to be blessed with wisdom, good health and prosperity. Daulat Tuanku!"

Muhd Afiq Haziq, 31,
Homestay owner, Tangkak

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

Nur Dalila Abdul Ghani, 45,
Entrepreneur, Muar

"Sultan Ibrahim is a humble and down-to-earth Ruler who always has the people's best interests at heart. May His Majesty have a blessed birthday."

Choo Ngiam Seng, 51,
Contractor, Kota Tinggi

"Sultan Ibrahim is a compassionate Ruler who always prioritises his people. His Majesty has been kind to all, regardless of race or religion. Wishing His Majesty a warm birthday, and may Tuanku be blessed with happiness and good health."

Abdul Razak Abdul Rahman, 51,
Taxi driver, Pontian

"I would like to extend my warmest birthday wishes to His Majesty, whose leadership and dedication to the people have been a source of pride and inspiration. May His Majesty be blessed with good health, happiness and continued prosperity for the nation. Daulat Tuanku!"

S. Diviyasri, 29,
Pharmacist, Johor Baru

"Wishing His Majesty Sultan Ibrahim a long and prosperous life. As a Johorean, I truly appreciate His Majesty for showing so much kindness and generosity to the people. I am indeed proud to be a Johorean."

Carmen Siew, 35,
Teacher, Batu Pahat

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UEM SUNRISE

UEM Sunrise Berhad 200801028815 (830144-W)

Cultural pride woven into fabric

By ZAZALI MUSA
metro@thestar.com.my

THE baju Melayu Teluk Belanga is growing in popularity among Malay men beyond Johor, attracting interest from those in other Malaysian states, Singapore and even parts of Indonesia, particularly the Riau Archipelago.

An expert in Johor traditional Malay attire, Shafie Ahmad attributed its popularity to Johor Ruler Sultan Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar and his son, Johor Crown Prince Tunku Ismail Ibni Sultan Ibrahim.

Sultan Ibrahim, who also serves as the King of Malaysia, began his reign on Jan 31, 2024, while Tunku Ismail serves as the Regent of Johor.

"Baju Melayu Teluk Belanga remains popular among Johor Malays, including the younger generation. Now, its popularity is rapidly growing among Malay men beyond Johor," Shafie said in an interview.

As a Johor native, Shafie expressed his delight in seeing Malay men from other states wearing the baju Melayu Teluk Belanga, an attire that embodies the true identity of Johor Malays.

Shafie, 64, who served as a cultural officer at the Johor Heritage Foundation (YWJ) for 17 years, is highly sought after in the state for his expertise.

Although he retired in 2019, Shafie remains active as a spokesperson for cultural events at YWJ, particularly those related to Malay traditional attire and zapin dances.

"True-blue Johor Malays wear the baju Melayu Teluk Belanga for Friday prayers and Hari Raya, unlike Malays from other states who prefer the baju Melayu Cekak Musang," he said.

Local historians note that the style was originally designed by the late Sultan Abu Bakar, the great-great-grandfather of Sultan Ibrahim.

This was to commemorate the relocation of the administrative capital of the Johor empire in 1866 from Teluk Belanga in Singapore to Tanjung Puteri, now known as Johor Baru.

"The style sets us apart from other states and despite evolving over time, it has remained popular among Johor Malays for 159 years," he said.

The Teluk Belanga style features a round neck with a slit in the middle, fastened by a detachable single button known as sebuku garam, typically crafted from a semi-precious or precious stone.

> **The style sets us apart from other states and despite evolving over time, it has remained popular among Johor Malays for 159 years.**
>
> SHAFIE AHMAD

"The most challenging part of making baju Melayu Teluk Belanga is cutting the round neckline, referred to as bulan (moon), and sewing the tulang belut (a specialised stitching technique) for the neckline," said Shafie.

Shafie showcasing baju Melayu Teluk Belanga (left) and baju kurung Teluk Belanga from his personal collection. — ZAZALI MUSA/The Star

Daulat Tuanku

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ISKANDAR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

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Tan Sri Dato' Sri Leong Hoy Kum (Pengasas dan Pengarah Urusan Kumpulan)
Ahli Lembaga Pengarah
Pengurusan dan Kakitangan

MahSing
Reinvent Spaces. Enhance Life.

Daulat Tuanku

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Sultan Johor

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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)

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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

Daulat Tuanku

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ECOWORLD
CREATING TOMORROW & BEYOND

ECOWORLD
INTERNATIONAL
CREATING TOMORROW & BEYOND