
Session 3

Unlocking The Iskandar Dream

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The discussion focused on the potential of the new Johor's new Special Economic Zone, co-developed with Singapore (JS-SEZ), to overcome the challenges that hampered the earlier promise of Iskandar Malaysia. Key points include:

1. Building on Past Foundations

Iskandar Malaysia, initiated in 2006, laid the groundwork for economic growth but did not fully meet expectations. However, the past 18 years should not be viewed as a missed opportunity. Instead, the journey should be evaluated, and lessons learned and strategies realigned for the future. The JS-SEZ offers a fresh opportunity to build upon these foundations, with joint efforts between Malaysia and Singapore and a commitment to improve governance and efficiency.

2. Strategic Lessons and Long-Term Focus

Drawing comparisons to the success of Shenzhen, China, panellists stress the need for incremental, phased development rather than short-term results. Long-term planning for infrastructure, especially for the next 50 years, is crucial to the JS-SEZ's sustainable growth.

3. Opportunities in Data Centres and High-Tech Investments

Johor's competitive advantages include land availability, renewable energy, and technological innovations like liquid cooling. There's strong potential for Johor to become a hub for data centres and tech investments, especially given Singapore's constraints.

4. Challenges in Connectivity, Regulations, and Talent Retention

To attract more investors, Johor must improve cross-border connectivity, streamline regulatory processes, and address talent retention issues, particularly given Singapore's higher wages.

5. Sustainability and Resource Management

There is growing attention on ensuring developments in Johor are sustainable, particularly in managing essential resources like water and electricity, to support the burgeoning data centre industry.

Overall, the SEZ is seen as a significant opportunity for Johor, but careful planning, regulatory streamlining, and sustainable growth are vital to avoid repeating the missteps of Iskandar Malaysia.