



Tan Sri Chong (third left) views the model of the Sandakan Harbour Square Project with (from left) Datuk Lau Ngan Siew, Yeo, Ireka-Charng Sheng Joint Managing Director Lai Voon Hon and other officials.

Harbour Square 'will place Sandakan in rightful place'

By James Leong

SANDAKAN: The Sandakan Harbour Square project undertaken by Ireka-Charng Sheng Development Sdn Bhd, will place Sandakan in its rightful place as the second most important town in the State after it is completed in three years' time.

"I am happy to be associated with the ongoing major project in Sandakan. I said I am very happy because the project started when I was the Chief Minister," Deputy Chief Minister cum Tourism, Culture and Environment Minister Tan Sri Chong Kah Kiat said after visiting the project site to view the progress of the construction work.

Chong said it is in fact long overdue for Sandakan to have this sort of project. Sandakan has always been the number two town in Sabah after Kota Kinabalu but unfortunately the injection of economy has not been that good.

"All along we have here and there sporadic development of shophouses but the private sector economy is not there all these years until the Sandakan Harbour Square project comes up," he said.

Sandakan needs more hotels, particularly top quality ones, because despite being the second biggest town, it is still lacking in facilities, convention or banquet centres for (large group of) people to gather and hotels, he added.

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Sandakan needs more hotels

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"For the Sandakan economy to really move, we need more hotels, at least one five star-hotel urgently, many more two or three and boutique quality hotels in the likes of Jesselton Hotel," Chong said.

"With such facilities, we could get more people to come to Sandakan. This has to be private sector driven with the government being the catalyst in assisting to promote or sell the idea," he pointed out, adding that he is appealing to local Sandakanites who are known to be very successful people, to venture or invest in hotels.

Sandakan is not only a nature city but also a historical town in Sabah and under municipal council president Yeo Boon Hai, it can turn into a city but it must have quality and good hotels ranging from two, three, four to five stars, according to him.

Chong said with the three daily direct flights from Kuala Lumpur, the international hub in the country, operated by Malaysia Airlines and AirAsia, more people can now travel directly to Sandakan.

With more people coming, it would help the airlines sustain the direct

flights but to get more visitors coming to Sandakan, it must first have more hotels for the tourists to stay as well as convention or banquet centres, he said.

The Chinese and Korean markets will be open up when the Kota Kinabalu International Airport expansion project is completed in two years and Sandakan is only half an hour flight away, he added.

Chong advised the people of Sandakan not to miss out on the opportunities of the booming economy, adding that Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Haji Aman, who is a very farsighted leader, has rightly identified tourism as one of the three pillars for the future of the State's economy.

Chong said he foresees a tremendous growth for Sandakan's economy in the next three years with the completion of the Sandakan Harbour Square project.

"The private sector should work together and support the local authorities' plans as Sandakan can be a very big international and regional market in the next three years," he said.