

Rise of Batu Kawan



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METRO NEWS

Wednesday, 19 Oct 2022



Roadmap to the future: An aerial view showing vast development taking shape around the “four-leaf clover” design interchange in Batu Kawan, with the second Penang Bridge and fish farms seen in the background. — Filepix

ONCE a backwater town in south Seberang Prai, Batu Kawan in Penang is rapidly shedding its quiet agricultural past, thanks to carefully planned development projects that hope to turn it into a smart eco-city.

In the early to mid-1900s, coconut and rubber plantations dotted the area in mainland Penang before they were replaced by oil palm plantations in the 1960s.

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Batu Kawan is now home to establishments such as Ikea and Design Village Outlet Mall, as well as a thriving industrial hub.

Its turning point came in the early 1990s when Penang Development Corporation (PDC) acquired a 2,560ha piece of land that would become Bandar Cassia.

The corporation planned to develop it into its third township after Bandar Bayan Baru on Penang island and Bandar Seberang Jaya on the Penang mainland.

PDC chief executive officer Datuk Aziz Bakar said they saw potential to spur a multitude of economic activities in the rural area that had mangrove forests and oil palm plantations, and a population of only about 5,537 (in 2010).



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'We are ramping up efforts to fiberise and provide smart features to cater to the needs of the projected population of 250,000 people by 2030.' -Datuk Aziz Bakar

"The main development plan remains the same for all our townships, which is an integrated and

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“Bandar Cassia differs by emphasising nature with its ‘Live, Learn, Work and Play’ concept,” he said.

One of PDC’s first projects was the Penang State Stadium, completed in 2000, followed by the Batu Kawan Industrial Park (BKIP).

Aziz said development was slow to start but accelerated following the opening of the Sultan Abdul Halim Mu’adzam Shah Bridge (second Penang bridge) in 2014, linking Batu Kawan to Bayan Lepas and the North-South Expressway.

The connectivity helped boost housing demand in Bandar Cassia and pull in investors for residential, commercial and industrial sectors. But PDC has bigger plans in store for the township.



There are many new development projects taking place in Batu Kawan, which has seen rapid growth in the past 10 years. — ZHAFARAN NASIB/The Star

Aziz said that in the next 10 years, they plan to set up 5G infrastructure and full fibre connectivity within Bandar Cassia to realise their vision of a full-fledged smart eco-city for the people and industries in the area.

“We are ramping up efforts to provide smart features to cater to the needs of the projected population of 250,000 people by 2030,” he said.

Batu Kawan Industrial Park, which currently houses 30 multinational companies, has been able to provide employment for more than 15,000 people, he added.

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At present, developments in Bandar Cassia comprise commercial (43%), infrastructure (19%), industrial (18%), residential (11%) and other components (9%) such as water reservoir, utilities, stadium and other public facilities.

About 500 units of affordable housing have been built out of the total 12,000 units planned.



Aerial view of Penang State Stadium in Batu Kawan, which opened in 2000 and can seat 40,000. It was one of the first projects undertaken by PDC. — Filepic

Aziz said PDC was currently developing two more industrial parks -- the 420ha BKIP 2 and 253ha BKIP 3 -- within their landbank to cater to investors' demand.

"It will be an 'extension' to the existing BKIP for the electrical and electronics (E&E), electronics manufacturing service (EMS), medical, automotive, precision engineering, equipment manufacturing and logistics sectors.

"Besides being targeted at creating mass employment, especially for knowledge and skilled workers, another component strategically planned is a medical hub, consisting of private hospitals, government hospitals and international-standard medical centres.

"This is a two-prong strategy that will not only boost Bandar Cassia, but complement Penang's medical tourism industry," he said, adding that PDC had signed several memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with domestic and international medical industry developers.

Aziz said among the joint development projects confirmed as part of the medical hub was between PDC, Medi-Tech City and Titijaya Land Bhd (93ha), and between PDC and iHeal Health Sdn Bhd (119ha).

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The Sultan Abdul Halim Muadzam Shah bridge was the catalyst for Batu Kawan's growth as it brought better connectivity to Bayan Lepas and the rest of the peninsula via the North-South Expressway. — Filepic

He said negotiations were ongoing with Health Ministry and the National Heart Institute to build government hospitals and a specialist centre to serve beyond Penang, including the Asean region.

Besides concrete developments, he also said more trees were being planted while landscaping, public spaces allocation and building bicycle lanes were in the plan.

"We will preserve the mangroves as well as put in many landscaping features to soften the concrete jungle.

"Normally, in any township, the green lung is set at just around 30% but we can achieve over 40% in Bandar Cassia," he added.

Aziz said Bandar Cassia was shaping up well.

"It should be a settlement modelled on the self-sustaining resilient structure and function of natural ecosystems while at the same time, embracing technology and smart features seamlessly.

"We have the advantage of excellent infrastructure connecting us to not only the island, but also to the rest of the country.

"I am confident that we will see it develop and thrive even more within the next 10 years," he

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