

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT – RADIO SINGAPORE INTERNATIONAL

Work groups to look into Singapore-Malaysia cooperation in the IDR

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Singapore and Malaysia will set up four work groups to look into better cooperation in Johor's Iskandar Development region or IDR.

This resulted in the First Joint Ministerial Committee meeting held at Pulai Springs Resort in Johor Baru on Monday.

The workgroups will look into facilitating immigration clearance, enhancing transportation links, tourism cooperation and environmental collaboration.

To find out what can be done to facilitate immigration clearance for potential investors in the Iskandar Development Region, Shereena Sajeed spoke to George Abraham, Chairman of the GA Group in Singapore.

GA: I think the main problem that Singaporeans face is the ability to get across the causeway the shortest time possible with the least difficulty. And the old causeway in the north is really a problem because you have all kinds of traffic that go through it. So one would have to find a better way to facilitate the ravel and make it smoother. One solution would probably be to issue smart cards or have a special clearance system with a few lanes for people who are having investments in IDR so they can use the Tuas causeway and breeze through special channels so they can get across quickly and this will probably have to be done on both sides.

How can transportation links be enhanced?

GA: Unfortunately we have at the moment only the two causeways, the old one off Woodlands and the other one which is off Tuas. And I think it's a matter of how to organize the existing causeways to get the maximum benefits and it looks like the easiest would be to work with the Tuas causeway because the IDR project extends all the way to Tanjong Pelapas and extends to Senai. So it would be easier for Singaporeans to use the expressways that we currently have for example, the Kranji or the PIE or the AYE, which are all no root points that can lead to Tuas and use the Tuas as the link to Johor Bahru. I would imagine that a large section of the people who want to use this would be people who, after living in Singapore but would want to have investments in Johor, especially in manufacturing or other related areas and might want to travel up and down everyday. One really has to look at the transportation becoming much easier.

One of the working groups will look into Tourism cooperation between Singapore and Malaysia in the IDR. What kind of potential is there in this?

GA: We all know that many of the tourists who come to Singapore also contemplate short visits to Malaysia. In fact, we already have ongoing tours that go across the

causeway and they have a look at some of the tourism places closer to Singapore like Malacca and even in Johor and other places. And I think if we have a concerted effort to try and tap into the existing facilities and the new ones that are upcoming, we can have a relationship where people can fly into Singapore and take advantage of the natural scenery and the surroundings that Malaysia has to offer especially with the new resources that they are planning in the IDR have come along the line of what has been projected.

What kind of environmental cooperation can we expect the working group to look into?

GA: I think it would have to cover a few fronts. One, would of course be the natural stretch of water which separates the straits of Johor from the Singapore straits. And the avoidance of pollution in these waters because it affects both the states. The other would of course be to ensure that the factory and the other amenities that are being built, especially the tourism amenities, resorts and so on have access to clean water and therefore, the environmental situation in the IDR does not drastically impact on the coastal areas as well as the geographical areas that IDR occupies.

Singapore's National Development Minister Mah Bow Tan has said that the workgroups will be tasked to look into specific collaborative projects. What do you think these will be?

GA: I would like to go back to the point that I made earlier, which I think is a win-win scenarios for both Johor and Singapore, where we can look at Singaporeans who live in Singapore but invest in Johor, in the various opportunities that are envisaged in the IDR and there are many reasons for this. It is much cheaper for them to run factories and other businesses in Johor where the cost of land, labour and utilities are much lower and also because the value of the Malaysian ringgit is lower than the Singapore dollar, they can use facilities and services in both the states, it will ensure that both investments are profitable.