



An artist's impression of the Sandakan Harbour Square project by Ireka Development Management Sdn Bhd.

Breathing new life into Sandakan

By Hamisah Hamid

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KUALA LUMPUR: The multi-million ringgit Sandakan Harbour Square is set to transform Sandakan from a sleepy town mostly known for its orang utan sanctuary and natural attractions into a modern, dynamic city on the east coast of Sabah.

The seafront urban renewal project, comprising commercial shops and offices, an international hotel and shopping mall, as well as a new city square and waterfront esplanade, will provide ample business opportunities, jobs and space for recreational and social functions.

Ireka Development Management Sdn Bhd (IDM) president and chief executive officer, Lai Voon Hon, said the project aims to rejuvenate the central business district (CBD) of Sandakan.

"The general topography of Sandakan is limited by the sea and

hill at the front and back of the town, leaving limited suitable land for town development. This has resulted in almost no new property development projects in the CBD in the last 20 years," he told Business Times.

The project, managed by IDM and supported by the Sabah government and Sandakan Municipal Council (MPK), covers 4.8ha land, including land reclamation.

Lai said the project is IDM's flagship project in East Malaysia.

IDM, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Ireka Corporation Bhd, is the development manager for London-listed Aseana Properties Ltd. Aseana,

which has property developments in other parts of Malaysia and Vietnam, is an associate company of the Ireka Group.

Lai said as an urban redevelopment project, "the Sandakan Harbour Square will be a catalyst for the modernisation of the town, with the aim of turning it into a tourist destination and a bustling commercial centre".

He said the third and the final phases of the project, comprising Harbour Mall Sandakan and Four Points by Sheraton Hotel, will be completed by year-end and early next year.

Between 3,000 and 4,000 jobs

are expected to be generated by the mall and hotel, which has gross development value of RM510 million.

Among the confirmed tenants for the mall are Parkwell Departmental Store & Supermarket, Tomei, Bata, SoxWorld, GNC, Levi's, The Body Shop, Jeff Eyewear Space and Gintell.

Lai said the whole project blends well with Sandakan's development plan.

"Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman's vision is to turn Sandakan into an education hub."

At the same ceremony, MPK president Datuk James Wong said the education hub, which covers 600ha land, will be home to 15,000 people.

He said the new shopping mall will cater to the needs of the student population.

Wong believes that the project will attract more tourists to Sandakan.

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