

# Grabbing a piece of the action

## Multiplier effects for the economy in the development of RRIM land in Sungai Buloh



**Behind The News**  
**THEAN LEE CHENG**  
leecheng@thestar.com.my

THE impending and long-awaited development of the Rubber Research Institute Malaysia (RRIM) land in Sungai Buloh, Selangor, which now belongs to the Employees Provident Fund (EPF), is expected to have tremendous and far-reaching multiplier effects for the property and construction sectors.

The development of the area is expected to lift the prices of properties in the surrounding townships and propel the rubber industry to a new level.

It will see the building of new rubber research facilities and centralise the various facilities of the Malaysian Rubber Board (MRB).

The research institute comes under MRB.

Its development would also open up the land for new uses other than agriculture.

The area will have medium to high-end housing, retail and shopping facilities, hotels and it will create open spaces, parks and industries.

But over and above all these, there will also be affordable housing projects, something which the people are eagerly looking forward to, as a result of the massive price increases of houses the last two years or so. For many decades, rubber as a commodity was one of Malaysia's economic strengths.

MRB director-general Datuk Dr Salmiah Ahmad would like to continue to put the rubber research centre on the world map.

She also wants to create higher value rubber products that would make the country a high-income economy.

How she plans to do that will depend on research and development and the rubber products that will be produced and commercial-



ised.

But in order to do this, the semi-government agency needs new facilities for research.

It plans to house its headquarters, business clusters, commodity college and a museum there.

If the land is to be left as it is, MRB is unable to fund the construction,

management or operations of these facilities.

After all, the business of MRB is predominantly research.

But while it may be short of funds, it has a huge land bank.

That 1,215ha in Sungai Buloh is one of them. MRB has other properties around the country.

The opening of the Sungai Buloh land for redevelopment is particularly crucial for the economy at a time when there are woeful news from the eurozone and the United States. It will definitely lift sentiments.

Compared with the various property projects being spearheaded by the Government, this development is by far the largest in terms of land size.

With 73ha being allocated for the MRT depot and 216ha for the rubber facilities, there is still the remaining 926ha in the southern portion.

### Increasing value

The redevelopment of the land is also part of the Greater Kuala Lumpur Strategic Development initiative project, which will eventually increase the land area of Kuala Lumpur.

In many ways, the change in land use is inevitable.

The rubber plantation is surrounded by growing townships on all fronts.

Towards the north is the Sungai Buloh New Village (Kampung Baru Sungai Buloh) and to the east are Kota Damansara and Damansara Indah.

On the western front is Kampung Sungai Kedondong and Taman Subang Bestari.

The high-end properties within the Tropicana Golf and Country Resort are located in the south, while the Subang airport and some government land are located in the southwest.

A developer has expressed intentions to build more middle-range and high-end homes in that area if he becomes a beneficiary.

The entry of the Sungai Buloh-Kajang mass rapid transit (MRT) will also help to open up the area.

This will help to transport labour resources from Sungai Buloh to Kajang or Cheras with a travel time of about one-and-a-half

hours.

From a property perspective, the land and its current infrastructure is interesting.

The Jalan Sungai Buloh-Shah Alam and Damansara-Shah Alam Highway divide the land in the middle with the northern portion housing the MRT depot and rubber research facilities.

The building of the research hub is expected to be completed in five years. Work on the MRT depot has already started.

This northern portion is under the jurisdiction of the Shah Alam City Council.

This portion may be developed first and earmarked to have two stations at this point in time. There is the provisional RRI station.

The southern portion comes under the Petaling Jaya City Council. Towards the southwest is the industrial land of Subang and Skypark, which was at one time, earmarked for development.

Hotel and commercial retail facilities were at one time planned for this Skypark area.

Thus far, the master plan for the entire area has been very much under wraps.

This will be undertaken by the EPF as the new owner of the land.

The master plan for MRB's portion has not started yet but the master plan should be ready by this year if work is to be completed in five years.

As for the other parcels, it seems that the development will be carried out concurrently. MRCB is expected to play a major role.

There is little talk of that today but there is always a possibility. Mohamad Lotfy Mohamad Noh, the managing director of EPF's subsidiary, Kwasa Land Sdn Bhd, is after all, a former director of MRCB.

But then again, there are other government-linked property companies, SP Setia, UEM group, Sime Darby group besides personalities who are all vying for a piece of Kuala Lumpur's biggest pie.