

Coke's RM1b vote of confidence

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NILAI: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak was heartened yesterday by the Coca-Cola Company's recognition of Malaysia as an important market and as its hub to serve the Asean region.

He said the confidence demonstrated by globally recognised brands like Coca-Cola to invest in Malaysia would spur more foreign investors to come to the country.

"*Nilai*, in our national language means value, and this is indeed a fitting description as I am confident Malaysia will offer significant value to the Coca-Cola Company," he said at the ground-breaking for Coca-Cola's

new RM1 billion state-of-the-art greenfield bottling plant at Bandar Enstek near here.

Najib said the company would also contribute to Malaysia's vision to become a global halal hub through its use of local ingredients and systems that follow strict guidelines for food preparation and to ensure quality.

"These fulfil the requirements set by the halal guidelines of Islam."

Also present were Negri Sembilan Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed, president of the Pacific Group (Coca-Cola Company), Glenn Jordan and regional director of Bottling Investment Group (Coca-Cola Company), Martin Jansen.

Najib said he began discussions with the Coca-Cola Company on the RM1 billion investment when he met its representatives in Singapore four months ago.

"I am truly happy that what we discussed just four months ago has today already become a reality.

"Coca-Cola is a widely recognised brand in Malaysia and I even remember the movie *The Gods Must Be Crazy* many years ago when a Coca-Cola bottle dropped from the sky over Africa ... it could have been any other bottle, but it was a Coke bottle."

Najib said the bottling business was capital and labour intensive and the company would reinvest six to seven per cent of its revenue in cap-

ital expenditure every year.

"In addition, this project will create employment opportunities for about 800 Malaysians in the first five years of operation."

He also said the company's entry into Malaysia would strengthen the local beverage and packaging industry as well as the logistics sector.

"These investments will bring state-of-the-art technology that will drive production efficiency.

"We also hope that the establishment of Coca-Cola's Asean business centre in Malaysia will make us a centre for production and distribution of its products in Asean.

"The plant will be the company's first investment in the country and will energise the local and national

economies while supporting the government's efforts to drive development through foreign investment and business partnerships."

An important feature of the new plant was its adherence to green construction.

When completed, it will be one of the most eco-friendly plants in this part of the world.

The prime minister added that Coca-Cola's investment would be supported by Malaysia's strengths, such as strong economic fundamentals, an educated workforce, conducive living conditions and a commitment to sustainability.

These strengths, he added, were compatible with the priorities that investors now seek.