KULIM in Kedah has evolved from a sleepy settlement into an industrial town. This follows the establishment of the Kulim Hi-Tech Park (KHTP) in 1996 when the state was administered by Barisan Nasional. The town, which is very close to Bukit Mertajam, Penang, was well-known previously for the vast rubber estates in the outskirts. In the mid-19th century, Kulim was famous for its tin industry. By 1890, there were 400 Chinese miners operating in Kulim. Today, the focus is on modern technology. There are 31 factories in KHTP which covers 1,700 hectares. The factories are mainly owned by multinational corporations. There are also 40 offices to support the 31 factories. Educational institutions such as Universiti Kuala Lumpur Malaysian Spanish Institute (UniKL MSI) and Politeknik Tuanku Sultanah Bahiyah are among the landmarks in Kulim. Many employees of KHTP live in nearby Taman Selasih, Taman Bersatu, Taman Desa Impian and Taman Sago.

Engineer Edward Liu, 28, lamented the lack of development in KHTP after Pakatan Rakyat took over the state administration. KTHP is only doing okay now. I havent seen any major expansion since 2008, he said. Restaurateur Fendi Azizan, 50, said the industrial park brought numerous job opportunities. He said many moved to Kulim to work in the factories there. He, however, believed the Kulim Municipal Council should do more to serve ratepayers. Citing an example, he said it should find solutions to ease traffic congestion in the town area. Petrol station helper Rofeath Ismail, 49, said the roads needed to be widened. There are severe traffic jams during school rush hours, she said.

Kulim is one of the state seats under the Kulim-Bandar Baru parliamentary constituency. In the 2008 general election, Lim Soo Nee of PKR won the seat by more than 1,000 votes. He obtained 10,559 votes while Lim Lee Choo of Barisan Nasional obtained 9,315 votes. Independent candidate Khairul Anuar Ramli obtained 1,101 votes. Kedah MCA chairman Datuk Chong Itt Chew said the party was confident that it could wrest back the seat from PKR. Ever since Pakatan wrested control of Kedah in the 2008 general election, there has not been much new investment in KHTP. It shows that investors dont have much confidence with the state administration. If Barisan secures victory in Kulim, we will work hard to push for more investments in southern Kedah, especially in KHTP, he said.