

PM: Bintulu can grow into major industrial centre

By AZAM ARIS

BINTULU, which has rich hydrocarbon and timber resources, can become one of the largest industrial centres in the country.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is very impressed with the overall progress achieved by Sarawak, said Bintulu which he last visited in 1983 has developed into a well-administered town.

"The roads are good. I think the town has grown 10 times since then. I believe it can become an important centre for petrochemical industries. This type of development has truly benefited the people of Bintulu," he told reporters in Miri yesterday.

In addition to the petrochemical plants, Bintulu has a special zone for timber industries at the Kemana industrial estate.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir began his official visit to Sarawak on

Tuesday and chaired a Cabinet meeting on Wednesday. He visited Bintulu on Thursday and spent a night in the Mulu National Park. This is his longest visit to Sarawak since becoming Prime Minister.

He is also impressed with the State Government's efforts to diversify its growth and to set up industrial centres in various parts of the state.

Near Miri, for example, the Mulu National Park which boasts of having the largest underground cave in the world, can become a major tourist attraction.

A \$10 million airport, being built at Mulu, is expected to be completed by the middle of next year.

"Environmentalists are expected to call on the Government to preserve Mulu as it is and not develop it into a tourist attrac-

tion. But if we do this, then only a few people like the environmentalists can appreciate Mulu.

"This is not democratic. We opened up Mulu because we want people from all over the world to see its beauty.

"We are not a rich nation that can invest a lot of money to create something like Disneyland. Parks like Mulu are original and much better than Disney World."

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said Sarawak has progressed well and fast. It is now even more developed than some states in the peninsula.

The State Government has successfully kept its major towns clean and properly planned. It also does not entirely depend on federal funds but utilise its resources well.

"Sarawak, unlike neighbouring Sabah, spends its funds wisely.

Sabah is also rich but there is not as much development as in Sarawak."

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir is also impressed with the friendliness of the people of Sarawak which he considers a major factor in reducing tension in the state.

On the Sarawak state election, he hopes the Parti Bansa Dayak (PBDS) — a component of Barisan Nasional but an opposition party in the state — can cooperate effectively with other component parties.

During his stay, the Prime Minister did not hold any specific talks regarding PBDS and Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu cooperation.

He said the fact that PBDS has not made a decision to contest as an opposition party in the state election is a good sign.