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Mahathir-duty '''

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LANGKAWI, July 15, (Bernama) -- Pulau Langkawi is to retain its duty-free status because local traders have begun to reduce prices of goods sold here, the Prime Minister announced today.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the government would not remove the status granted in 1987 after the local business community took heed of his reminders not to charge steep prices for duty free goods.

However, he was still unhappy with some traders out to make too much profit despite the reminders, the Prime Minister told reporters after a one-day visit here.

When he opened the Langkawi structural plan exhibition here last Jan 5, the Prime Minister warned local traders that the government might remove the duty free status if they continued to sell duty free goods at unrealistic prices.

He said when it declared the island a duty free place, the government wanted to see that the duty exemption benefited visitors to Langkawi.-- mor

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The Prime Minister was confident that Langkawi would be the country's biggest tourist centre by 2020.

+ Based on Langkawi's current growth, that target can even be achieved sooner than 2020. Langkawi now outgrows other places nationwide, he said.

Earlier, the Prime Minister spent five hours visiting the island accompanied by Langkawi Development Authority (LADA), general manager Haji Halil Abdul Mutalib, state executive councillor Datuk Bakar Taib, district officer Haji Mohamad Ishak and heads of department.

Among the places he visited were the Langkawi international airport extension project, CHOQM park in Kuah, hawkers' stalls and hotels and chalets under construction.

He said the international airport was being extended to cater for the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition scheduled for November.-- more

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He said a larger tarmac and parking apron were needed for aircraft taking part in the exhibition. _@

The airport terminal building also need to be expanded because of increasing tourist arrivals, he said.

The Prime Minister said he was satisfied with the design of the extended airport and that it was due for completion a month ahead of schedule.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said LADA would build a 300-room five star hotel to ease accommodation shortage on the island.

The project was due for completion in four months, he said.

While here, the Prime Minister was briefed on Langkawi development projects by LADA, Tenaga Nasional and Telekom Malaysia officials at the Burau Bay Resort hotel. -- Bernama

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