

PM: Upgrade shopping facilities in Langkawi

By SHARIFF HAMID

BIG retail companies which are familiar with running sophisticated shopping facilities should set up boutiques, shopping complexes and departmental stores in Langkawi to cater for the better-class tourists, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"It would be useless to make Langkawi a free port and not utilise the sale of goods as a means of attracting people here," he said in an exclusive interview with Money Matters in Langkawi. The financial programme was aired on TV3 last night.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir described the present shopping facilities on the island as poor because "it is the original traders who have expanded but they are not yet sophisticated enough to cater for the better-class tourist".

"It has grown very rapidly but

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in some instances it is not rapid enough. For example, we are going to have the Lima Air and Marine Show in November and a lot of people have already indicated they will be coming.

"We need about 1,000 rooms but most of the rooms are already booked. We need to build hotels quickly and other accommodation to cater for the show. It is going to be a very rapid development," he added.

"There are not many beaches in Langkawi, so they must be made available to everyone. It is important that valuable land is not used for unproductive development.

"For example, if you have a nice piece of land on the island and you build some chalets, especially small ones which cater for hippies, they will definitely not bring much money into the tourist business.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the Government wants all developments in Langkawi to be well distributed. Hotels will only be built in certain places while padi fields, wooded hills and the natural beauty of Langkawi are preserved.

He said the four-year old Langkawi airport is now being expanded to cater for more flights and bigger aircraft. "There is still a problem, I think, during certain parts of the year ... school holidays, for example, the demand for seats is very heavy and the planes are not available.

"We have allowed direct flights from Singapore but apparently, SIA wants to go to Penang first before flying into Langkawi. This limits the number of seats to the island. We hope that they will fly direct soon," he said.