

Why Merdeka Stadium can't be preserved

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JITRA, Mon. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the country cannot afford to preserve the Merdeka Stadium merely for its historical heritage.

He said Malaysia, which is not that rich, could not afford to preserve the stadium although a historical event had taken place there.

"The Government's plan is to get some money out of the stadium for the construction of a new stadium in Kuala Lumpur.

"The cost for the new stadium is high and where do we get the money?" he asked when speaking at a news conference after opening the RM12 million Jitra hosital here.

He was asked to comment on a statement by Sports Minister Datuk Annuar Musa last week that Merdeka Stadium, Stadium Negara and Changkat Pavilion could be demolished in a deal which would give rise to the new RM415 million Bukit Jalil Sports Complex in time for the 1998 Commonwealth Games.

Annuar has said the proposal had been submitted by the United Engineers of Malaysia (UEM) to the Economic Planning Unit.

Under the proposal, UEM will build the Bukit Jalil

Complex for RM415 million in exchange for a piece of land along Jalan Hang Jebat and Jalan Stadium.

Both the stadiums and Changkat Pavilion are located on the land which has been valued at RM500 million.

Dr Mahathir said the Government wanted to build a new stadium not only for the Commonwealth Games (in 1998) but because Kuala Lumpur needed a much bigger stadium located outside the capital.

Dr Mahathir said the Government's plan was for the benefit of the people.

"We too are aware of the nostalgia and historical factors but we also need to consider other factors. If we do not want to continue with the plan, we will not have a place to hold the games.

"One day we still have to do it. For me, it is better now than later.

"If we wait, the cost will increase and there will be more problems."

Dr Mahathir also said the Government was willing to build a monument at the place in the stadium where the country's independence was declared by the late Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Alhajif if the stadium had to go.