

Capitalise on God's gifts, rural folk told

By Rosli Zakaria

JERTIH, Sat. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today urged the rural folk to maximise the potential of natural attractions in their areas, such as waterfalls, hot springs and rivers, to improve their economic status.

He said these natural attractions were "free capital" (modal percuma) which, if properly managed, could become money spinners because they have the potential to attract tourists.

"We need a lot of capital to develop our economy. But we do not need to have a lot of capital if we know how to capitalise on God's gifts — our brains and natural attractions," he said.

Malaysia is blessed with natural attractions and good weather conditions, enabling all kinds of vegetation to grow well.

"But sometimes the people are not aware of the potentials or fail to appreciate them."

Dr Mahathir was speaking to more than 1,000 people at the La Hotspring in Hulu Besut before being briefed by Besut district officer Saad Muda on the tourist areas in the district.

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He was accompanied by Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali. Also present were Menteri Besar Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, Public Enterprises Minister Datuk Dr Yusof Nor and Deputy Primary Industries Minister Datuk Tengku Mahmud Mansor.

The Prime Minister spent two hours touring the facilities at the hot spring, which included a new bridge and public shelters, despite the heavy rain.

Dr Mahathir, Siti Hasmah, Wan Mokhtar and his wife Toh Puan Ashiatun Suhaimi also left a permanent reminder of their visit — by imprinting their footprints on cement blocks.

The La Hotspring is unique because the water emerges from three fissures on a rocky surface. The temperature is nearly boiling point at the fissures and cools to about 45 degrees Celsius in the natural pool.

Dr Mahathir said La Hotspring was a good example of the "free capital" which could be developed into a popular tourist spot. The local people should take advantage of the natural gift to set up businesses.

"The more efficiently you manage this hot spring, the better is the chance for you to earn more money."

In other countries, hot springs were bigger and better developed although initially

there were no facilities.

"But as time went by, the people started to build shops, restaurants, public amenities and now hotels have been built there."

Dr Mahathir also said that while touring Besut by helicopter earlier, he noticed other attractions such as rivers, waterfalls, rapids and scenic areas, which

could be further developed without disturbing the natural environment.

In Kemaman, Dr Mahathir said great ambitions and rich natural resources will not guarantee the success of any race unless the people have the right attitude and values to achieve success.

"If we are willing to learn

and are not afraid to face challenges we will be able to succeed. By having great ambitions but without the necessary drive to succeed will not achieve anything."

The Prime Minister was speaking at the laying of the foundation stone for the Terengganu Advanced Technical Institute in Teluk Kalong here this afternoon.

The RM37 million institute with its aim of producing high-tech workforce for the needs of the country will receive technical expertise from Switzerland.

He said that despite being surrounded by strong and powerful countries, Switzerland had managed to uphold its sovereignty because of the people spirit and patriotism.