

Another milestone for telecoms sector

By Farush Khan and Joseph Bingkan

PENAMPANG, Mon. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has described the opening of the RM21 million building of the telephone exchange here as another milestone in the country's increasingly sophisticated telecommunications industry.

The Prime Minister believes such a sophisticated system would also put Malaysia on the world map and expedite its development.

"With Malaysia entering the information age, it will be able to keep up with the rapid development in the telecommunications industry," he said at the opening ceremony.

He also touched on the advantage of privatising the telephone services, saying that it had brought greater benefit to the country and the people.

"If the services had remained with the Government, they would not have developed as fast as the Telecom Department has rules and restrictions in the approval of projects and allocations," he said.

However, due to speedy

decisions and implementation of projects following the privatisation of the services, Malaysia has emerged as one of the countries with a sophisticated telecommunications system.

"We have not reached the peak, but I am confident a more sophisticated system will be introduced without delay."

He congratulated Telekom Malaysia for being able to become a giant company providing services not only in the country, but also venturing abroad.

Dr Mahathir said the opening of the new station, providing 20,000 telephone lines, was only the beginning of greater development for Sabah.

Telekom Malaysia executive chairman Tan Sri Dr Mohd Rashdan Baba said apart from the underwater cable between Kuantan and Kota Kinabalu, Telekom Malaysia was also implementing two high-capacity domestic underwater cable systems linking the peninsula with Sabah, Sarawak and Labuan.

Both the systems using fibre optics and hailed as the most sophisticated in the world cost about RM780 million will be operational

by the end of next year.

He said Telekom Malaysia had also allocated RM1.2 billion for telecommunications infrastructure development in Sabah for the next five years, RM600 million of which was for the rural areas.

Rashdan said the company would also extend its public telephone lines to the rural areas. At present, there are 2,000 public telephones in Sabah, 800 of which are in the rural areas.

He said 2,000 kampungs had been identified for the installation of public telephones by 1998 costing about RM25 million.

He said the construction of the telephone exchange building would increase the number of subscribers in Penampang, which has 8,200 subscribers now.

The telephone exchange is computerised with 20,000 lines, complete with Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN), Sabah's first.

He said the number of subscribers in Sabah had increased from 76,000 in 1987 to 134,000 now.

Officiating at the groundbreaking ceremony of the proposed RM100 million Kurnia Perdana housing and commercial project in

Jalan Tuaran later, Dr Mahathir said the project was proof of greater development in Sabah and the confidence of investors now.

He said it was also proof that the Government encouraged development projects in the State.

Dr Mahathir said projects such as this would also enable the local people to take part in business activities such as the supply of building materials.

He hopes the expertise of Chew Piau Berhad, which is undertaking the project, would be useful to provide skills to the local people to compete for contracts not only in the country but also abroad.

However, he reminded those in the industry that there was no shortcut to success and that they should not resort to unhealthy practices such as cheating to make profits.

"It will be more profitable if one carries out one's activities honestly, he will continue to be given contracts in the future," he said, adding that it was his hope that Malaysia's construction industry could achieve greater heights.