

No duty-free status for Tasik Kenyir, says Dr M

TASIK KENYIR, Tues. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Federal Government would not turn Tasik Kenyir into a duty-free area as this was not practical.

He said there was no need to change the status of the lake to be like that enjoyed by Pulau Langkawi as not everyone chose to go to a destination because of its duty-free attraction.

"Of course there are some people who visit Pulau Langkawi because it is a duty-free island but we have no plans to declare Tasik Kenyir as another duty-free centre.

"As we all know, things in Pulau Langkawi are found to be much more expensive compared to those sold outside, despite its duty-free status," he said.

Menteri Besar Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad was reported to have said recently that the State Government would support a proposal by a group of investors to turn Tasik Kenyir into a duty-free area.

He had said that by giving duty-free status within the integrated development area, the lake would attract not only investments in the hospitality industry but also become one of the country's prime inland tourist

resorts.

Dr Mahathir, responding to questions from reporters after a briefing on the construction work of Gadek Bhd's Kenyir Lake and Golf Resort, a turnkey project by Perspec Prime (M) Sdn Bhd, said should Tasik Kenyir be turned into a duty-free centre, the authorities would have to erect a fence around the area, which could cost a lot of money.

On the investors' reluctance to help develop the lake, he said with the strong co-operation from the State Government and the Central Terengganu Development Authority (Ketengah), there should be no problem in attracting those willing to build medium-class and high-class hotels.

"Whenever I ask the investors on this matter, they will give me different reasons. It is normal for everyone involved to point fingers and blame one another," he said.

He also said that with more facilities provided at the lake, including a more reliable air service to the area, the State Government should be able to attract more tourists, as well as potential investors to the place.

Asked if environmental protection would be a priori

ty in developing Tasik Kenyir, the Prime Minister said it had been a norm for the Government to ensure that all regulations were strictly followed.

"We are very concerned about matters relating to environmental issues. But there are some quarters who want us to pay too much attention on the environment to the extent that no development should take place at all," he said.

He pointed out that being too obsessive on protecting the environment could eventually lead to a point where the people would never be able to enjoy all the beautiful places anymore.

"What is the point of having beautiful places or exciting caves in the jungles, if no one can visit. Beautiful things, if cannot be seen, will become ugly.

"Just like wearing a veil (*pardah*) over the face, no one can tell if a person is beautiful or otherwise," he said.

Dr Mahathir also expressed satisfaction over the progress made in developing Tasik Kenyir, especially with the growing interest among investors in building international-class hotels around the area.

He said it was obvious there had been more efforts

taken to develop the lake than before.

"There are no more submerged dead trees blocking the boats' passage anymore, which makes the lake look cleaner and more attractive," he said.

He expressed confidence that Tasik Kenyir could become as popular as Pulau Langkawi if a proper management approach was adopted by the authorities.

"We can see today that there are budget chalets and affordable hotels offered to tourists to the lake. Soon five-star accommodation would be available as well.

"It is also not surprising that smaller towns will soon take shape around the lake in the near future," he said.

On Ketengah's role in developing the lake, he said the organisation would continue to do so and the Federal Government would consider the former's request for financial aid to further develop Tasik Kenyir.

Also present were Menteri Besar Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, State Islamic Affairs committee chairman Datuk Dr Yusof Nor, Gadek Berhad chairman Datuk Yahya Ahmad and Perspec Prime (M) Sdn Bhd managing director Hashimuddin Datuk Abdul Kadir.