

PM calls for optimum use of natural resources

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KUALA NERANG, Fri. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today called for optimum utilisation of the country's natural resources in order for Malaysia to become an economic force on par with other developed countries.

He said it would be a waste if the people failed to effectively utilise the abundant natural resources available in the country.

"Malaysia is a beautiful country which is rich in natural resources and we should think of ways to utilise these resources.

"We should think of ways to further develop our country and to further enrich our people," he said in his speech when officiating at the Desa Utara Pedu Lake resort here today.

Also present were his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Osman Aroff and

Maju Holdings Sdn Bhd executive chairman Abu Sahid Mohamed. The RM30 million resort is developed and managed by Maju Holdings.

Citing Japan, Dr Mahathir said although the country was not rich in natural resources it had become an economic power because the people were rich in ideas and were willing to work hard.

"Malaysia can also emulate its success if the people work hard and think of ways to optimise utilisation of our natural resources."

He said it would be pointless for the country to be rich in natural resources if the people did not know how to capitalise on them.

For example, the Prime Minister said, "we know gold is valuable but if we do not know how to mine it and process it, the item would be useless".

"What is important here is not the natural resources but for the people to think of ways to use them beneficially."

However, Dr Mahathir warned the people not to be

greedy and overzealous in their quest to become rich by taking short cuts.

In jest, he said there were people in Kedah who saw the potential in selling "Buah Kerinji" (a local dried fruit) but wanted to get rich fast.

"Due to the difficulty in climbing the tree to get the fruit, the people cut down the trees.

"Thereafter, they can no longer get the fruits in the coming years," he said.

The Prime Minister also called on State Governments to develop more lakeside resorts into tourist attractions.

"In a meeting with the Menteri Besar recently I asked them to provide incentives to attract investors to help the State Governments develop the lakes, including offering free land," he said, referring to the method as the "lost leader" concept.

Dr Mahathir said although the State Governments might experience a loss in the beginning, they stood to gain in the long run.

Citing Pedu Lake, Dr Mahathir said many people were interested to buy land in the area for various projects.

Later, Dr Mahathir when asked by reporters to elaborate on the "lost leader" concept said the method was a way of generating businesses at isolated areas like Pedu Lake.

"The concept will enable us to woo investors to isolated areas and as a result it will push up the land price in these areas."

Citing Langkawi, Dr Mahathir said when the island was in its initial development stage, the land was offered at low prices.

"This attracted investors to the island and as a result the land price in Langkawi has soared," he said.

Dr Mahathir also suggested that operators of lakeside resorts promote lake hopping between the resorts.

He proposed that the operators utilise amphibious aircraft services to ferry tourists from one resort to another.

Earlier, Abu Sahid said the RM30 million Desa

Utara Pedu Lake resort was built in a record time of 123 days.

The resort, the second lakeside resort at Pedu Lake after Holiday Inn Pedu Lake Resort, is based on traditional "kampung" houses.

It expects a 60 per cent occupancy rate in its first year of operation.

The 106-room resort in Kuala Nerang, Kedah, aims to attract the adventurous with its water sports activities on the lake and jungle trekking nearby.

Abu Sahid said the resort was completed in record time with minimum tree-felling to enable the chalets to blend with the natural surroundings.

The company managed to complete the resort fast because it roped in its subsidiary companies to handle the construction. Maju Holding is involved in, under its stable of companies, among others, property development, engineering, steel milling and manufacturing.

This is its first hotel project.