

PM: All must care for environment

By K. Bala

TANJUNG RHU (Langkawi), Sun. Caring for the environment is the joint responsibility of developers and the residents of the rapidly growing island resort, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Describing the island, particularly the scenic Tanjung Rhu as "God's gift to us", the Prime Minister said developers and locals must ensure that they look after the environment.

Opening the luxury Radisson Tanjung Rhu hotel developed by Kauthar Venture Capital Sdn Bhd, he said there have been complaints that the beautiful corals of the island have been littered with cans dumped indiscriminately into the sea.

"Developers and the local people must preserve the environment and keep the island, including the beaches clean," he added.

Dr Mahathir also referred to another environmental eye-sore the shanty stalls and trading areas amidst hotels and beach resorts.

At certain places like Tanjung Rhu, such unkempt structures do not blend with the type of development and scenery.

In such cases the owners of these places must co-operate and move out to other areas. But even when they move to new areas, it is their responsibility to keep

their premises and surroundings clean.

Dr Mahathir reminded residents, particularly that some of them have become millionaires following the rapid development on the island. Because of these developments, many local residents have benefited as land prices had escalated manifold and industries have sprung.

But some, he said, still remain as fishermen and farmers.

Generally most of the island folks live better and in houses bigger than many on the mainland like Alor Star.

He urged the residents to be realistic and reminded elected representatives to play their part in explaining such matters to the local population.

Dr Mahathir was happy that development has come to Tanjung Rhu which he described as the best spot on the island. "Unfortunately, we could not develop the area earlier because of some problems," he added.

With the opening of the hotel, he said Tanjung Rhu would progress like the other beachfronts on the island.

Earlier in his speech, chairman of Kauthar, Tan Sri Tajudin Ramli, said careful and detailed planning have been given and efforts will be taken to ensure that further development of the area would be

in harmony with its natural beauty.

"Environmental preservation, will be the essence of our development works in the area," said Tajudin. Yesterday, Tajuddin said that he had dropped plans for a golf course as it would harm the environment and ecology.

He said Tanjung Rhu is a perfect area -- with beautiful scenery, sandy beaches and flora and fauna. "Only quality and perfection from our staff can match its beauty which is beyond description," he added.

"We want to retain as much as possible of the natural beauty. Although the development concept of the 250 ha area is being discussed, we want the end product to be a work of art," he said.

The 300-room Radisson Tanjung Rhu Hotel was redeveloped at great financial cost by Tajudin from what was formerly Mutiara Court.

Much debate went into the reconstruction of the hotel, but Tajudin finally decided that the old structure should remain while major refurbishment works were carried out on the building.

"The cost of the refurbishment could have easily built a new hotel, but we wanted to do things without affecting the environment," he added.

Four to five hotels are being planned for the area

including the Radisson and the original estimate was RM1.2 billion.

"We believe it will cost more because of certain design ideas that we have for these hotels," he said.

Tajudin, who is also the Malaysian Airlines executive chairman, has commissioned a professor-poet to study the designs of the Malay palaces.

"We want to look at the places that the aristocracy lived in and how some of the designs could be incorporated into our hotel to reflect our past heritage," he said.

He added that the idea was to blend the environment with the heritage to give a new image to luxury hotel accommodation.

The design on the second hotel which will have between 200 and 250 rooms has started. Construction will take about a year, but the design concept will be the critical factor.

"We hope to decide on the design concept by next month or latest February, using the assistance of the professor-poet," he said.

To preserve the natural beauty, Tajuddin has taken pains at great financial cost to restore the scars left by previous developer Promet Berhad on the land where the Radisson is sited.

He has commissioned a botanist to identify trees peculiar to the area which had been cut down in the previous development.