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Behrang (News focus)

BEHRANG ULU AT THE THRESHOLD OF NEW ERA

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TANJUNG MALIM, March 21 (Bernama) -- Residents of Behrang Ulu are increasingly feeling the winds of change sweeping through. Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's presence there this Saturday will serve to reinforce their confidence of a bright future.

Located some 6km from here, Behrang Ulu will enter the era of heavy industries when the Prime Minister performs the ground-breaking ceremony for Proton's second factory.

The occasion will mark the start of efforts to transform the backwater of some 1,000 farmers into "Proton City", a RM4 billion integrated automobile township that will provide a multitude of job and business opportunities.

Infrastructure like electricity and water supply and telecommunications facilities will be upgraded while a highway will be built between Slim River and Teluk Intan to link up the proposed township with the planned west coast highway.

To people in the four traditional villages and their vicinity, the project is a blessing.

"The young people in the villages now prefer to work in Selangor or Kuala Lumpur. Maybe they will return once the Proton plant is ready," said Sungai Sekiah village head Haji Ramli Haji Mohd Noor.

"Working in their hometown will enable the youngsters to save on rental while the old folk will no longer be lonely with them around," he said.

Haji Ramli, 76, said most of the villagers were farmers, rubber tappers, bamboo collectors or self-employed.

The favourite topic of conversation in coffeeshops is the windfall landowners can expect.

A 0.4-hectare (1 acre) plot which previously cost less than RM20,000 is now going for more than RM100,000.

The Orang Asli community is also looking forward to reaping the benefits of the project. Sibaru Cikap, 55, of Kampung Orang Asli Chinggung said the majority of the 200 villagers were working at nearby orchid farms owned by Japanese.

He hoped that the RM1 billion Diamond Creeks resort project in the area would also help to change their lives for the better.

Sundry shop owner R. Moorthy, 39, already has plans to expand his business to tap the economic spin-offs to be generated by the township project.

He now depends on the residents of Kampung Behrang Baru and a couple of nearby traditional villages for business.

Zainab Abdullah, 52, said business at her food outlet had begun to improve even though the project had not yet got off the ground.

The strategic location of the five-year-old shop at the junction to Behrang Ulu has helped to attract customers.

Yong Mok Soong, 30, who runs the only motor repair shop in Kg Behrang Baru, the village nearest the project site, also hoped that business would pick up once the project is implemented.

"I do not have many customers, sometimes none at all," he said.

But the 476 settlers of Felda Sungai Behrang are already one step ahead of the other residents -- they have set up Syarikat Behrang Development Sdn Bhd (SBDSB) to develop their 2,231-hectare plot into an integrated industrial park.

The company, managed by Corporate Line (M) Sdb Bhd, is working with two major Japanese companies, Nissho Iwai Corporation and Hazama Corporation, to attract Japanese to invest in its project.

Life is still peaceful and laid-back in the area which is dotted with orchards, oil palm and rubber plantations.

But will this remain once Proton City has blossomed into its cherished state of giving Japan's Toyota City a run for its money? -- Bernama

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