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Thai-Senator (with pix)

CHARERN HAS VISION FOR M'SIAN THAIS

By: Mohd Zahari Morad

ALOR SETAR, May 13 (Bernama) -- When Charern Intachat, 56, takes his oath as Senator tomorrow, about 65 Malaysian Thais will be at the Dewan Negara to witness the ceremony.

The ceremony will be a historic event as this is the first time a senator of Thai origin is being appointed in Malaysia to represent the minority of 50,000 Malaysians of Thai descent, many of whom are in Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, north Perak and Terengganu.

For the former Kedah Customs Department director, the senatorship comes with a big responsibility to steer the Thai community towards a better livelihood in this prosperous country.

"We have long yearned to have a representative to voice our views and problems at the highest level because since Independence we don't have such an opportunity," he told Bernama when met in his office at Cergas Jaya Complex in Bukit Kayu Hitam, near here.

"This is an honour and a sign of recognition by the government to the Thai community," said Charern, a project adviser to Cergasjaya Properties, which is managing the Bukit Kayu Hitam duty-free complex.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad announced Charern's appointment at a Thai community gathering in Titi Akar, Pendang, the biggest Thai settlement in Malaysia, on Jan 4.

Born in Kota Tanah, Alor Setar, the son of a mechanic, received his primary education at Sekolah Melayu Seberang Perak up to Standard Five and pursued his secondary education at the Sultan Abdul Hamid College where he obtained excellent results in the Highest School Certificate (HSC).

Among his close friends while at the college is Kedah Menteri Besar Tan Sri Osman Aroff.

His initial ambition is to become a doctor but due to poverty and unable to get a scholarship, he was forced to reject an offer from a university in Madras and joined the Customs Department with the rank of Assistant Superintendent.

He served the department in various capacity until his retirement on Feb 1, 1995.

On his vision, Charern, who is fluent in Malay and can write in Jawi, said he has set two main objectives -- to improve the education and socio-economic levels of the Thai community.

Charern said the younger generation of Malaysian Thais are lagging in education because they did not get a chance to further their education as they are staying in villages where education facilities are limited.

"Nevertheless, some of them have succeeded in education by becoming lecturers, doctors, lawyers and senior government officers," he said.

He said the Malaysian Thais are mainly engaged in the agricultural sector as many of them are farmers and rubber tappers.

For Charern, the time has come for his people to be on equal terms with the other races in playing their role in the country's development towards achieving objectives of Vision 2020 to transform the country into a developed nation.

In this regard, since the announcement on his appointment, Charern went on a familiarisation tour nationwide to introduce himself to his people and listen to their problems and proposals to be raised at the Dewan Negara.

Less developed economies and consumers can benefit from the lower cost of research and production by sourcing the knowledge, materials and goods

from the best and cheapest source.

Dr Mahathir said the globalisation of trade and industry will accelerate with the progress of information technology and, in future, the determining character of a rich or poor nation could be the accessibility to information resources and their application, and not on its economic wealth or industrialisation.

Dr Mahathir also underlined Malaysia's commitment to become a global information society and highlighted the establishment of a Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) that will link up the new Kuala Lumpur International Airport, Putrajaya which is to be the new federal government administrative centre, and the country's capital Kuala Lumpur.

"It will be the nerve centre to steer and lead the nation to meet the challenges of an information-rich society," said Dr Mahathir, adding that with the latest information hardware and software, the MSC would become a teleport.

Both foreign and local investors can utilise Malaysia as a springboard to expand into the emerging Asia Pacific markets with the MSC for which a Multimedia Development Corporation will facilitate direct investments in the project, he said.

Malaysia is considering a teleport concept for Putrajaya and if realised, it will be the second Asian country after Japan to subscribe to this telecommunications revolution.

A teleport is an integrated facility that provides its users with fast, convenient access to advanced telecommunications through satellites, fibre optics, microwave and other networks.

Dr Mahathir later previewed the Tokyo Business Show '96, Japan's largest office, information and communications exhibition that will be opened officially tomorrow.

He also visited the Tokyo Teleport Building which, like the Tokyo International Exhibition Centre, is located within the new Tokyo Teleport Town, an integrated township built on reclaimed land in the middle of Tokyo Bay.

Japan also has teleports in Osaka and Yokohama. -- BERNAMA
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