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Mahathir-projects

M'SIA HAS RIGHT TO IMPLEMENT BIG PROJECTS, SAYS DR M

BINTULU, March 16 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today dismissed allegations that the huge projects being implemented in the country are mere monuments, saying Malaysia has every right to implement them.

The Prime Minister said there was no reason why Malaysia could not venture into big projects while the country progressed.

"They only look like monuments even though they are not monuments to us," he said when referring to allegations that the Petronas Twin Towers, Kuala Lumpur Tower and the proposed federal government complex in Putra Jaya were mere monuments.

Dr Mahathir said this when simultaneously launching three projects -- Bintulu Baru Industrial Project, Borneo Paper and Pulp Sdn Bhd and Sarawak Pulp and Paper Sdn Bhd here which cost a total of nearly RM26,000 million.

"I can assure everyone, locals and foreigners, that we are not interested in building monuments," he said.

He said Malaysia had the right to build buildings taller than the tallest building in the world if it was capable of doing so.

No one should feel insulted or annoyed when a developing country like Malaysia chose to embark on such projects, he said.

Dr Mahathir said in the implementation of massive projects, including the Bakun Hydroelectric Project (HEP) in Sarawak, the suppliers of equipment and machinery should be sensitive to the needs of the country.

"We want to maximise the domestic contribution towards these projects. We want to minimise imports and maximise the use of local products, expertise and materials," he said.

"They must maximise local content...we cannot afford to import 100 percent but it must be balanced from local sources, including the use of local contractors and sub-contractors."

He said suppliers should not import unnecessary things such as earthwork equipment which could be sourced from within the country.

He said the country was trying its best to reduce its balance of trade deficit, and in December last year it managed to post a surplus of about RM650 million.

"The government is tackling the problem head-on," he said.

The 15,000-hectare Bintulu Baru Industrial Park (BBIP) is to be developed over 10 to 20 years by Sarawak Pulp Industries Sdn Bhd and Bintulu Development Authority (BDA) at a cost of about RM20,000 million.

The proposed RM3,000 million Borneo Paper and Pulp Sdn Bhd (BPP) mill, sited in Tatau, not far from here, is a joint venture which involves the New York-listed Asia Pulp and Paper Co Ltd while the RM3,000 million Sarawak Paper and Pulp Sdn Bhd is joint venture between public listed PWE Industries Bhd and Indonesian-based RGM International Group.

Present at the launch were Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud, Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Salleh Said Keruak, federal and Sarawak state ministers, senior civil servants and corporate figures. -- Bernama

AHM YBY