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PM wants Tioman to be further developed for tourism

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KUANTAN, Sun. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has directed the Pahang Government to further develop Pulau Tioman, including constructing a town on the island to attract more tourists.

Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohd Khalil Yaakob said the directive was issued last week during Dr Mahathir's private visit to the island, often described as one of the 10 most beautiful in the world.

"The PM and I had an extensive tour of Tioman. Besides using the helicopter, we also walked a few kilometres around the island to get a first-hand view on how this place could be further developed," he told reporters at the State MCA double festival open house at Bandar Indera Mahkota sports complex, today.

Also present were Pahang Local Government and Consumer Affairs Committee chairman Datuk Kan Tong Leong, who is also State MCA vice-chairman, Bandar Indera Mahkota Assemblyman Ti Lian Ker and other dignitaries.

Khalil said the PM had also directed the building of a road linking the east and west sides of the island, and a marina.

"Both of us agreed that more development projects should be carried out. However, I wish to give an assurance that the projects will not have any adverse effect on the environment.

"For instance, the town will be modelled after the island towns in Greece and Italy...no cutting of jungles or hills will be allowed. Environmental aspects will be emphasised," he added.

"We will instead plant more trees on the island."

He said developers who would undertake the construction of the town, would clear large tracts of land that were planted with coconut or rubber trees.

Khalil, however, refused to reveal its location.

"It will be a simple island town where tourists can spend their leisure time when visiting Tioman. There will be shoplots, souvenir centres and stalls where they can eat and drink. The town will act like a one-stop centre for tourists.

"These facilities will be constructed along a hillslope. Currently, there are no such facilities on the island. Tourists have no choice but to eat and drink at their hotels or chalets. This can be quite boring."

Khalil, who is also Pahang Umno liaison chief, added that more hotels would be built. "The State Government, with the co-operation of chalet and hotel operators would line up more programmes for tourists to complement efforts to attract more people to the island."

He said the authorities would ensure that the construction of the hotels did not contravene EIA rulings.

"We hope all these projects could be completed by the year 2000," he said, adding that the State Government also planned to expand Tioman airport.

He said that work to widen the airstrip was being carried out at a cost of RM50 million.

Khalil said the construction of a marina was deemed necessary in view of the increasing number of tourists who came to the island using their own boats.

"There is a need for the marina so that they can keep their boats at one place. If they cannot use the boat, say during the rainy season, it could be kept there."

Khalil said the Pahang Government would ensure that development projects to be carried out "blended nicely with the island."

"We will tropicalise the concept. This will be our priority in keeping Tioman as one of the world's main tourist attractions."

He added that the State Government would co-operate with companies in developing Tioman.

Water catchment areas, waterfalls and wildlife sanctuaries, including the marine park in the island, would continue to be preserved. "They will never be disturbed," he said.

Khalil added the Pahang Government would engage a consultant to conceptualise the projects once a study, undertaken by the State Economic Planning Unit and other agencies, was completed.

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