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Grand celebrations to usher in 21st Century

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MALAYSIA will usher in the 21st Century in grand style with a two-year long programme called "Malaysia's Centennial Towards The New Millennium", Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi announced yesterday.

He said the programme, from September 1999 till August 2001, will highlight Malaysia's history and achievements over the last 100 years with regards to politics, economy, society and culture.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will officially launch the programme on August 30 at the Bukit Jalil National Stadium.

The ceremony will coincide with Malaysia's 42nd year of Independence at the stroke of midnight.

Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) will have cross-overs from Bukit Jalil to celebrations in the various states.

There will also be a video-conferencing session between Dr Mahathir and the menteri besar and chief ministers.

"One unique feature of the event will be when the Prime Minister inserts a special message for the coming generation into a time capsule, which will only be opened on August 30 2099," Abdullah said.

He was speaking at a press conference in Putrajaya after chairing a meeting of the Cabinet sub-committee that is organising the celebrations.

Involved in the programme's organisation are the Culture, Arts and Tourism Ministry, Primary Industries Ministry, the Treasury, and the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development.

Abdullah said among the objectives are to strengthen Malaysians' love for the country, increase international awareness about the achievements of Malaysians, instil among Malaysians a culture of visiting local tourist attractions, and promote international tourist arrivals.

He said several existing events will be packaged and promoted as part of the Centennial celebrations. These include the Merdeka Day, National Language and Literature Month, Malaysia Fest, Colours of Malaysia Parade, Shopping Carnival, Malaysia World Grand Prix Formula One 99, World Cup Golf 99, LIMA 99, and Le Tour de Langkawi.

Abdullah said major new events will also be introduced, including a National Tourism Gathering, Malaysia Expo, National Water Festival, Seasonal Shopping Carnivals, Malaysian Fruits Fiesta, and the construction of a 100 years of Malaysia memorial.

"The Centennial programme is an important national agenda towards our vision of becoming a high-tech nation. Therefore the participation and commitment of all parties including government agencies, private sector and all Malaysians are important to ensure its success," he said.

Several other countries in the world are organising special programmes based on their own culture and history to celebrate the new millennium. Germany is hosting the Hanover World's Fair and shifting its capital to Berlin, Britain is building the Greenwich Dome, and other special activities are being organised by Italy, Egypt, Belgium, the US, Spain, Holland, Switzerland and Singapore.

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