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Mahathir-Minister

I WON'T BE SENIOR MINISTER WHEN I RETIRE, SAYS MAHATHIR

By: Ahmad Fuad Yahya

PUTRAJAYA, June 21 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he will not become a senior minister after his retirement.

" When I retire, like a good old man, I retire. I will spend my time praying because my days are over.

" So I have to prepare for the next world," he said in response to a question at a news conference on his first day at his new office here.

Dr Mahathir, who officially moved into his new office at the ultra-modern government administrative capital about an hour's drive from Kuala Lumpur, said the new office complex was built to accommodate the needs of present and future prime ministers for the next 100 years and beyond.

" One does not plan for oneself but for the future of the country.

" As much as we built the KL International Airport for the next 100 years, we built this city for the next 100, 200, 300 years" he said.

The prime minister said it was irrelevant for him whether he would occupy the new office or not because it was built for future governments of Malaysia.

He said the new office reflected some of his ideas, including the general designs and appearance, in particular the big dome atop his office block.

Dr Mahathir said he had insisted that it should be the onion-shape dome like the one that one could find in his home town of Alor Setar in Kedah.

" This is a very personal touch and I hope it is not too ugly in the eyes of others.

"I hope my successors and the successors of my successors will enjoy this building," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he had planned to retire in 1998 to give enough time for his successor to take over and prepare for the general election and furthermore, the year was very important because Malaysia was holding several important events including the Commonwealth Games.

The prime minister had earlier explained that he decided to stay on when he was forced to sack his deputy, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim after finding him morally unfit to lead the country. He has since appointed a new deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Putrajaya, which covers 4,581 hectares, is one of the two planned intelligent cities under the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) project. The place was formerly an oil palm estate.

Dr Mahathir said the layout of the project was done by the Public Works Department with no foreign consultants involved and the whole project was designed, built and managed by Malaysian companies using 90 per cent Malaysian materials.

"Although in the case of the furniture, the design is French, the manufacturers are Malaysian, so are the chandeliers and everything else because we want this to be a showpiece of Malaysia's ability to do things in the construction industry," he said.

Dr Mahathir said there might be snide remarks and cynicism about him being an extravagant Malaysian prime minister who was wasting money with the Putrajaya project but he could assure the people that the government would make a lot of money out of the project.

"I expect the profit to be made by the government from the development of Putrajaya to be very considerable...it is not a waste of money," he

said.

He said the land value of the area had already appreciated to RM100 per square foot in the middle of the new city and RM85 per square foot in the periphery, compared with RM7 per square foot when the government bought the land.

He would not be surprised if the land value rose to RM5,000 a square foot in a hundred years.

"Of course, if you look from the viewpoint of some people, this mad prime minister of Malaysia, as usual, is going crazy about mega projects... yes, we have mega projects here but these are mega projects which are very well calculated and we have the money to finance this," he said.

The government had specially set up the Putrajaya Development Corporation which raised all the funds for the projects and is now renting the office space from the corporation at a very reasonable rate.

Dr Mahathir said the government would dispose of some of its properties in the best sites of Kuala Lumpur which would fetch a considerable amount of money.

Some of the properties would be sold, some used by other institutions and universities and some converted into museums.

"My office and the cabinet room (at Jalan Datuk Onn) will be converted into a museum because four prime ministers of independent Malaysia had worked in that office," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is now staying at his own house at the Mines Resort City, is expected to move into his new official residence in Putrajaya before September this year.

A new official residence for the deputy prime minister will also be built in the new city.

-- BERNAMA

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