

09 JUL 1999

Mahathir-Extravagance

PUTRAJAYA, CYBERJAYA NOT EXTRAVAGANT, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

PUTRAJAYA, July 9 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today brushed off critics who label the twin intelligent cities of Putrajaya and Cyberjaya as extravagant projects.

He said Malaysia did not "borrow a cent" in order to build the two cities, major components of the nation's Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) project.

"Fortunately for us, we budgeted for this at the time when the ringgit was strong at RM2.50 to the US dollar. So we did not spend that much money. If we have to do it again now, it would cost at least twice as much," he said responding to a question from a foreign journalist about detractors suggesting that the projects were extravagant.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at a news conference on the second of the three-day 3rd MSC International Advisory Panel (IAP) meeting, here.

He said there had been no strain on the country's budget as it had enough money to pay for everything it needed.

He said: "When we started this project we had a lot of money and we were not going to borrow from anyone. And in fact, until now, we have not borrowed a cent in order to build these two cities."

Dr Mahathir said a person was not considered extravagant if he spent within his means and could be called that if it was otherwise.

"We are not extravagant at all. A person is extravagant if he spends beyond his means. A billionaire spending one billion dollars is not being extravagant because he has the money.

"But if a person is a millionaire and spends like a billionaire, that is being extravagant," he said.

Yesterday Dr Mahathir officially launched Cyberjaya which, among others, will house local and foreign multimedia and information technology companies as well as cutting-edge research and development facilities.

Last month, he moved into his new office in Putrajaya, the new federal administrative capital located within the MSC, a 750-sq km area designated as a hub for the development of multimedia products and services.

He said Malaysia also did not borrow money to build its new KL International Airport (KLIA) in Sepang which was opened a year ago. Just like Putrajaya and Cyberjaya, the airport is also located within the MSC.

"We don't build monuments, we build things that we can use and we don't build it just for today, just for the present PM's pleasure," he said.

The prime minister said although many people might not believe it, Malaysia had been very conservative in its financial management and that projects built were meant for the future.

Dr Mahathir said the government took pains to plan a project properly, citing the example of the KLIA which had 10,000 hectares of reserve land to accommodate future expansion.

He said the airport was constructed to last at least 100 years when the passenger volume would reach 125 million.

In contrast, the old Subang airport was designed for 400,000 passengers a year and when it was closed 30 years later, it was handling some 17 million travellers annually, he said.

"If you build an airport for the next five years, you will be in deep trouble because finding a site for a new airport is one of the most difficult things anywhere in the world and the Japanese will tell you that," he said to the laughter of those present, including the 25 IAP

members and representatives.

Japan built the Kansai airport in Osaka on an artificial island.

"I don't know what kind of air travel we will see 100 years from now but at least we'll have the space. You can't move an airport every now and then and I hope this will be the last time we have to do so," he said.

On the competition posed by similar multimedia initiatives like the ones in Hong Kong and Singapore, Dr Mahathir said they might offer something which the MSC might not.

"But we think that we have some competitive advantage and we look forward to working closely with them because this is an industry which is growing at a very rapid pace.

"And no one has a monopoly on the kind of knowledge and development that you would expect from IT and multimedia. There will be room for everyone and I am quite sure interaction between the different centres would be beneficial to all of us," he said.

On electronic government, Dr Mahathir said there was no doubt that in the future most governments would turn electronic.

He said Malaysia was getting the necessary inputs from all the relevant people to enable it adopt the right way of implementing e-government.

On the sessions with the IAP members and representatives, he said Malaysia was committed to examining all the ideas and advice given and described the meetings as useful and fruitful.

-- BERNAMA

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