

22/06/1999

We'll make gains from Putrajaya, says PM

PUTRAJAYA, Mon. - The Government will make considerable gains on its RM22 billion investment in the Federal Administrative Centre here over the next three decades.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the decision to invest in the centre was long-term planning and not an extravagant undertaking.

He said although the project would benefit the people and the country in the long-run, critics would still regard it as unnecessary.

"This is a big investment on the part of the Government and we expect to earn quite a considerable income over the next 20 or 30 years.

"I know there will be snide remarks and cynicism about this extravagant Malaysian Prime Minister who is wasting money.

"It is not a waste of money but an investment to make money. But if you look at it from the viewpoint of some people, this mad Prime Minister of Malaysia is going crazy over mega projects," he said after touring the new Prime Minister's Department building.

Also present were his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Abdul Halim Ali, Putrajaya Holdings Sdn Bhd chief executive officer Datuk Mohd Hashim Hassan and Putrajaya Corporation president Tan Sri Azizan Zainul Abidin.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would not make any money at present as this was a period of building infrastructure.

He said as private developers made a lot of money from their projects, there was no reason why the Government should not make money from its projects.

Dr Mahathir said Putrajaya Development Corporation, the developers of the project, had bought the land to construct the administrative centre for only RM7 per square foot.

"But the current price is about RM100 per square foot and in the peripheries, it is RM35 per square foot. The Government will make money until, of course, someone devaluates our currency," he said.

He said the administrative capital would be able to accommodate Government departments "for the next 100 years, 200 years or maybe 300 years," just like the KLIA which was built for the next 100 years.

"(But)...the thing that attracts some people is that this country is extravagant, the Prime Minister is indulging in spending money for himself so that he will look grand in a grand office etc, etc."

Asked whether the economic downturn had affected the construction of the project, he said it had not.

"It did not because almost 90 per cent of the building material was sourced locally," he said adding that a "very low" inflation rate had also helped to keep the costs low.

He said there was a 10 per cent increase in costs because some of the building materials were imported.

Stating that the Public Works Department was in charge of the overall planning of the project, Dr Mahathir said he had insisted that the domes in the complex be onion-shaped.

"I must admit that I insisted that the domes should be onion-shaped like the one you can find in Alor Star where I come from.

"That is a very personal touch but I hope it is not too ugly because as

you know, beauty is in the eye of the beholder," he said.

He also said the Government would dispose some of its strategically-located properties in Kuala Lumpur which could fetch good prices to offset the cost of the project.

He said some of these would be turned into museums and universities.

Asked by a foreign reporter as to why there were elements of French architecture in the PM's Department, Dr Mahathir said: "Well, this is not actually a traditional Malay hut.

"Malays used to stay in wooden huts and all that. It is quite difficult to transfer the architecture of the hut into a big building like this. So, we have to borrow the interior design from other places."

On the administrative centre, Dr Mahathir said there would be guided tours for the public who wished to visit the area including the Prime Minister's residence, Taman Wetlands and the seven km-long man-made lake.

"We want the people to come and see their capital. It is not my capital, it is the people of Malaysia's capital. We want them to see what we have done and we want them to be proud of this capital," he said.

Dr Mahathir also touched on allegations that a tunnel was being built near his official residence as claimed by some Opposition members.

"As we will be providing the Light Rail Transit services to Putrajaya, the tunnel is being constructed for that purpose.

"They (tunnel) are not meant for me to escape to KLIA in case I am hounded out of my country," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the decision not to build a house for the Deputy Prime Minister in Putrajaya had been overruled.

"I hope there is a residence for the DPM because I do hope that future Governments will have both PMs and DPMS," he said.

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