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Entertainment village just waiting for PM to do inaugural honours

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is expected to launch Malaysia's own "Universal Studios", known as Entertainment Village (E-Village) this Friday night.

Hong Kong action star Jackie Chan has confirmed his attendance while other big Asian stars such as Shah Rukh Khan and Anita Sarawak have also been invited.

Project developer Entertainment Village (M) Sdn Bhd is excited about playing host to "the gathering of about 600 guests comprising members of the International Advisory Panel (IAP) of the MSC, cabinet ministers, ambassadors, corporate personalities and those in the film industry and multimedia both locally and from overseas".

Executive vice chairman of Entertainment Village Datuk Ibrahim Abdul Ghaffar said the company expected business for the multi-billion-ringggit film studio and production facilities to pick up soon.

And if the A\$6,000 (RM13,200) per day charge by Australia's Fox Studios is used as a yardstick, business, in terms of revenue generated, should be healthy.

Already four to five foreign parties had shown interest in the studio, Ibrahim said.

He told newsmen this on their recent visit to the project site in Dengkil, Selangor recently.

The upcoming launch will be for Phase 1A of the RM3 billion project on a 52.4ha site.

It comprises the Studio Precinct, which has a giant film sound stage - said to be taller than the one at the recently-opened Fox Studio complex in Australia - and a virtual studio.

The virtual studio will have 3D-animation, special effects and post-production facilities for digital content creation.

James Ring, director of Australia's Pollard Productions, the producer for the opening event, said such virtual studio facilities and technology were exactly what international film makers wanted.

The main studio, Sound Stage One stands 16 metres in height with a floor area of over 200 square metres. It is said to be Asia's largest.

"As height and capacity go hand in hand, this sound stage will accomodate some pretty big productions - handling stunts and special effects. It is a world-class facility for hire to the local and foreign film makers," Ring said.

Ibrahim said the development of such facilities in Malaysia would serve not only as an entry point into the film production and entertainment industry on a full-scale basis, but also as an enhancement to the development of the Multimedia Super Corridor project.

"And then there is the spillover effects or benefits to the locals. We can expect to see the birth of several downstream enterprises."

Phase 1A the of E-Village involves a development cost of some RM100 million while total cost for the entire Phase 1, spanning three to four years, is estimated at RM400 million.

Phase 1 will eventually comprise eight studios and one virtual studio, post-production area, administration block, multimedia centre, a central marketing complex, parks and parking lots, a timewalk and an Academy of Dramatic Art.

Phase 2 (RM1.5 billion) and 3 (RM1.1 billion) will see the construction

of a virtual theme park, mini Malaysia park, mini Asian towns, theme village for shooting and locations, multimedia centres, post-production offices, convention centre, health farms and an arts and craft shopping complex.

The whole project, 70 per cent owned by Malaysians and 30 per cent by a British individual, Steve Grace (president of British Aerospace) is expected to be completed between seven and 10 years, covering a total area size of 485ha.

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