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MAHATHIR-PROJECTS

PROJECTS IN MALAYSIA WERE BUILT TO MEET FUTURE NEEDS, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 6 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said infrastructure projects in Malaysia were undertaken to meet future needs and were not wasteful.

"In Malaysia we invest for the future. We don't invest for the immediate needs. When we do something we look into the future," he said in an interview with the Financial Times of London.

He said that the projects undertaken by the government were within its means and it did have to make borrowings to finance them.

"To build a new airport for example, we looked into a hundred years from now. Supposing the number of passengers would increase to 100 million, we would need a very big airport.

"So we reserved 25,000 acres of land for the new airport. At the moment we have facilities for 25 million passengers," he said, in apparent reference to the KL International Airport (KLIA) in Sepang.

He dismissed perceptions that the government had spent too much money on the KLIA project.

He said the airport cost the government RM9 billion, and even at the old exchange rate of RM2.50 (to one U.S. dollar), it was about US\$3.5 billion.

But, he said the Hong Kong airport (Chek Lap Kok) was built for US20 billion and it was much smaller than the KLIA.

"So how can you call it a big project? It is an essential project built at a very low price. And if we were to build now or later, it would cost very much more," he added.

The prime minister said similar considerations were also given on all the projects in the country.

He said: "Some people call that mega projects, a term invented by others. To us it's not mega at all. It is within our means. We didn't borrow from anybody to build all these things.

"People keep on saying 'ah, these mega projects.' Mega is actually a comparative term. If you spend on something that you cannot afford, yes, it is a waste.

"But we are spending money on things that we can afford and we need."

Dr Mahathir said the money was generated internally and this has boosted the growth of the country's economy. -- BERNAMA

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