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Putrajaya-Pride (News focus)

PUTRAJAYA: A NATION'S PRIDE BUILT FROM SCRATCH

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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 7 (Bernama) -- As Malaysia's new command centre where the nitty gritty of running the country is handled, it is only appropriate that the government is proposing to turn Putrajaya into a federal territory.

With the new status, the effectiveness of Putrajaya as an electronic government administrative capital, with its well-planned development combining pleasing aesthetics and practicality with cutting-edge technology, is set to be further enhanced.

The fact that it is located in the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) will also have a bearing in ensuring the smooth implementation of the MSC project which will be one of the trend-setting multimedia industry centres in the world that is hoped to rival the Silicon Valley in the United States one day.

An agreement making the 4,931-ha Putrajaya a Federal Territory was signed at Istana Negara here today by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah for the Federal Government while the Regent of Selangor Raja Idris Shah signed for the state.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad witnessed the signing for the Federal Government and Menteri Besar Datuk Dr Mohamed Khir Toyo, for Selangor.

The agreement will come into force on a date to be decided later upon obtaining consent of the Conference of Rulers and upon passage of the related Bill by the Selangor State Legislative Assembly and Parliament.

The idea to build Putrajaya as Malaysia's federal administrative centre away from Kuala Lumpur was first floated by Dr Mahathir followed by the identification of several potential sites, including Janda Baik in Pahang and Prang Besar in Sepang, Selangor.

Many welcomed the idea to shift the government machinery to a new location as it was felt then that there was a need to put the ministries and government departments scattered all over Kuala Lumpur in one place.

The urgency was also there as the nation's capital was breaking at the seams as unrelenting development and commercial growth took up more and more valuable space compounded by the bane of urban living -- traffic congestion.

The Cabinet in June 1993 approved Prang Besar, which was mainly made up of rubber and oil palm plantations then, as the site for the development of the new administrative city and it approved the Putrajaya development plan in February 1995.

Prang Besar was renamed in October 1994 as Putrajaya in memory of the country's first Prime Minister the late Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj.

The agreement to set up the city was inked in July 1995 between the federal government and the Selangor government under which a body known as Putrajaya Corporation would be formed to administer and manage Putrajaya's development and related matters on behalf of the federal government.

Frayed nerves will be soothed by a visit to Putrajaya where beautiful buildings dominated by the imposing green-hued Prime Minister's Department and the majestic pink Putra Mosque are surrounded by cooling greenery peppered with colourful flowers and a tranquil body of water.

This vision in green is in line with the government's selection of the "garden city" concept for the development of Putrajaya with the preparation of a masterplan focusing on the 4,400ha site, about half the size of Labuan which is another federal territory of Malaysia beside Kuala Lumpur.

Dr Mahathir launched the RM20.09 billion project dubbed "the intelligent city of the future" on Aug 29, 1995 by putting a gold-coated brick on a display structure.

At the launching ceremony, he said Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya and the nation's leading gateway KL International Airport (KLIA) would one day become a megacity that could rival other megacities such as Tokyo-Yokohama.

Such strategic administrative-commercial pairings of cities exist in other countries such as Australia (Canberra-Sydney) and Brazil (Brasilia-Rio de Janeiro).

Dr Mahathir said then that he was proud that the new city was being fully planned and developed by Malaysians themselves, reflecting what could be achieved with the Malaysia Incorporated spirit towards fulfilling Vision 2020 of making Malaysia a developed nation by year 2020.

Development costs would include RM700 million for land acquisition, RM15.29 billion for infrastructure, government offices and amenities, and RM4.1 billion for housing and commercial purposes.

Apart from Putrajaya itself, the surrounding areas of some 10,000ha would also be developed, he added then.

The development of the city is being done in two phases over 10 years, the first involving infrastructural development between 1996 and 2000 costing RM9 billion and covering some 2,500ha.

The second phase from 2000 to 2005 entails the development of commercial facilities costing some RM11.5 billion covering a 1,870ha-area.

When fully completed, Putrajaya is expected to have a population of 350,000 and 67,000 residential units, half of them reserved for civil servants. It will also have 276,000 sq metres (3 million sq ft) of commercial space.

Apart from government offices, commercial units and housing, the area will have, among others, a 4.2km long boulevard, 10 connecting bridges, a marina, a hospital, a district police station, squares and plazas in every precinct as well as sports and cultural centres.

Dr Mahathir began his first day at the new administrative capital on June 21, 1999 with the Cabinet holding its first ever weekly meeting there two days later.

The prime minister could not conceal his delight at how fast the project was being implemented when he once remarked that he moved into his new office just three years after performing the ground-breaking for the Government Precinct, an area dedicated to the bulk of the federal government offices, on Sept 10, 1996.

But not everything in Putrajaya will be made of bricks and stones for the environment is given a pride of place in the scheme of things.

Beside the various types of trees and plants dotting the area, an important component of the city is the development of the 400ha Putrajaya lake and the 197ha wetlands.

The multi-purpose lake is designed to cater for recreation, fishing, water sports and water transportation, among others.

Only a federal territory status could justify the existence of Putrajaya, a nation's pride built from scratch, to help propel Malaysia in this new millennium.

-- BERNAMA

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