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Mahathir-Progress

COUNTRY'S PROGRESS DUE TO ORDINARY MALAYSIANS, SAYS PM

KUCHING, Feb 23 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the country's progress is due to the contribution of ordinary Malaysians.

He said although many people credited him for the country's development, it was actually the people who helped push his simple ideas into sophisticated and complex ones.

"For example when I proposed to have an air show in Langkawi, which is meant really for small aircraft, we gave this job to a certain company but they had great ideas by making it the major airshow in the world" he said.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at the opening of 1st Silicon's wafer fabrication plant at Sama Jaya Free Industrial Zone here on the first day of his two-day visit to Sarawak.

The US\$1.7 billion (RM6.46 billion) wafer fabrication plant is the first of its kind in the country.

Similarly, when he suggested that a cycle race be held around Langkawi, the organisers had promoted the Le Tour De Langkawi as a race covering Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak.

"Now it has become a major world event in cycling," he said of the successful event which was held in Peninsular Malaysia last week.

Referring to 1st Silicon's wafer fabrication plant, Dr Mahathir said it is yet another example of the "Malaysia Boleh" spirit.

The state-of-the-art plant, situated on 39 hectares of the state's only high-tech park, currently has a workforce of 600.

It will expand its workforce to 1,000 employees when the company's production of 0.18um micron micro-chips hits a maximum output of 30,000 wafers per month by next year.

One um (micron) is one millionth of a metre and is equivalent to 1/300 of the thickness of a human hair while a wafer is a mirror like disk of silicon onto which complex circuits such as microprocessor chips are built.

Silicon is a natural semiconductor and is the main ingredient of common beach sand.

Dr Mahathir also said a high-tech industry of such nature is usually not found in developing countries but in highly developed countries.

He said the whole new era of information technology has not only enabled the people to do all kinds of marvellous and miraculous things, at the press of a button, but also access information from all over the world.

He commended the Sarawak government for taking the lead in venturing into this field (wafer fabrication) with Sharp Corporation of Japan as its main partner in technology and wafer supply.

Earlier, Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud said Sarawak is expected to produce its own home-grown engineers and technicians, in the next five years.

They are expected to account for 80 per cent of the state's requirement for skilled personnel for the growing high-tech industry.

He said this is in line with the state's Knowledge-Economy Masterplan, which is currently being drawn up to accelerate growth of high-tech industries.

Abdul Taib was pleased that many Sarawakians were now returning to the state to take up jobs in high-tech industries, although for a lower salary.

He also said the state government is according priority to information technology education, at all levels, as part of efforts to bridge the

urban-rural gap. -- BERNAMA
CJ/RDY DVS