

23 MAR 2001

Langkawi-Mahathir

DR MAHATHIR ARCHITECT OF MODERN LANGKAWI

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LANGKAWI, March 23 (Bernama) -- Langkawi residents, shopkeepers, hoteliers and government officials agree that without Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's keen interest and untiring efforts, the island resort will not be what it is today.

"He is the prime mover the architect of Langkawi's development," Langkawi District Council Deputy President Mansor Haji Ismail said.

"I always look forward to the Prime Minister's visit as he has so many good ideas on developing this place," Lee Boon, a trader said.

The Prime Minister in the initial stage of Langkawi's development will make it a point to visit the island at least every month to inspect the projects and propose new ones to the local officials.

"Langkawi has developed so much and has become famous because of Dr Mahathir," said Ismail Abdullah who sells souvenirs to tourists.

The Prime Minister has put Langkawi on the world map and through his efforts the island has seen rapid growth and now boasts more than 20 international standard hotels, a new international airport and other facilities and also had played host to various international events.

"Dr Mahathir has provided so many opportunities for the local people to increase their income and live a better life," said a Malaysian of Thai descent who now operates a food/souvenir stall in Kuah.

As the venue for the "Langkawi Dialogue", as the retreat for Commonwealth Heads of Government, as host of the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition (Lima), Langkawi International Festival of Arts and various international standard sports events, Langkawi had gained much fame and income and the man behind all this is the Prime Minister, said a government official.

Langkawi which will be proclaimed a Tourism City by the Sultan of Kedah tomorrow will be administered by a Municipal Council.

Municipality status while enhancing the image of the local authority on the island would also provide for bigger Federal allocation that could be used to recruit professionals and better equipment to serve the needs of the 70,000 Langkawi residents and the 30,000 tourists who are present in Langkawi at any one time.

It is an achievement for Langkawi, from being administered by a Sanitary Board in the early years, it will be a Tourism City run by a municipal council. First Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman was among those who served as President of the Board.

From Sanitary Board it became a Town Board in 1945 and in 1976 it became a Local Government District Council and on April 29, 1987 it was upgraded to the Langkawi District Council and accorded duty free status. On Dec 6 last year it was gazetted as a Municipal Council.

From a staff strength of 11 in its early days, the present local authority has 299 employees of whom 199 are contract or temporary workers.

Among the modern equipment the council now has is a RM100,000 "Bobcat" which can do the job of several people such as in the nursery, in tree planting, digging holes and relocating plants and trees.

It also has a "beachcomber" to clean up the beaches, two road cleaners, 20 garbage collection trucks, three boats to check on sea pollution and two incinerators which can destroy 20 tonnes of garbage daily.

The Langkawi Municipal Council's success in the area of cleanliness had attracted the attention of several other local authorities including those

from Thailand such as Surathani and Phuket.

Surathani District head Somchat Praditphorn acknowledged the role of machines in keeping Langkawi clean and said he would adopt such methods for his own district which had a population 800,000.

Meanwhile the President of the Langkawi Tourism City council Datuk Ismail Hamid said its elevation would not result in any increase in rates at least for now.

He urged people not to listen to rumours about impending increase in rates.

With its motto "Langkawi Clean and Beautiful", the Langkawi Municipal Council discharged its duties in close cooperation with its staff and the relevant authorities, he said.

Several ex-employees of the local Council were happy over the new status for Langkawi and expressed the hope that it would continue to develop and prosper.

Former overseer, Harun Ibrahim, 61, of Kampung Padang Lalang Kuah said it was a dream come true for Langkawi which had progressed from a remote transit point for fishermen into a major international tourist resort.

"Imagine the difficulty the workers went through in those days giving service manually but now we have all this sophisticated machinery," he said.

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