

14/10/2001

Dr M: Tourism park a gift to the people

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said children should be able to study and appreciate nature at the Paya Indah Wetlands tourism park in Dengkil.

The Prime Minister said by inculcating love for the environment, the younger generation could lead a balanced life in this era of sophisticated technology.

Opening the park yesterday, Dr Mahathir said the area, about 50km from Kuala Lumpur and covering over 3,000 hectares and holding more than 43 million litres of water, could be an ideal centre for learning about the environment and nature.

"I hope Paya Indah will be educational for the younger generation, to shape their personality in an era of sophisticated technology," he said, describing it as the Federal and Selangor governments' gift to the people.

Dr Mahathir said the wetlands also had enormous tourism potential as there was an increasing number of visitors, both local and foreign, who appreciated nature.

"It is an ideal place for family outings where you can spend the whole day enjoying the beauty of nature or experiencing activities such as horse-riding, roving, canoeing, biking, cycling and sailing," he said, adding that it might cost a fortune to enjoy such facilities, particularly horse-riding, elsewhere.

He also advised the people to help maintain the cleanliness and condition of the premier eco-tourism park, where resort-type chalets await visitors.

There are many species of animals in the park, including migratory birds, Muscovy ducks, crocodiles from Langkawi, a fish called the Arapaima Gigas which can grow to more than two metres long and four hippopotamus from Botswana.

"We also have the common water buffaloes here, but I think some of them might have found their way home," Dr Mahathir said in jest, as the animals were from nearby villages. The Nile hippopotami were a gift from the Botswana Government.

Telekom Malaysia Bhd chairman Datuk Mohamed Radzi Mansor presented a cheque for RM750,000 to Dr Mahathir for the upkeep of the mammals for three years.

Businessman Chua May Yoon also made a contribution of RM1 million to the Malaysian Wetlands Foundation which manages the park.

In his speech, the Prime Minister also urged environmentalists not to be fanatical but adopt a realistic attitude to development.

Paya Indah Wetlands has 14 lakes, most of which are disused tin mining pools.

The Government has lent RM33.4 million to the foundation to manage it.

Speaking just before the Prime Minister, Malaysian Wetlands Foundation chairman Tan Sri Razali Ismail said it took "four long years" for the park to materialise.

Thanking the Government and Dr Mahathir for his personal interest in the environmental project, Razali said the wetlands could supply treated water to Kuala Lumpur and Selangor if the situation arose.

Razali thanked the Selangor Government for alienating the land and hoped that it would allow the land be maintained as such in perpetuity.

Other interesting spots at the park are the Exploration Centre which houses an array of interactive and educational exhibits, a Palm Garden

reputed to have one of the largest collections of palm species in the world, and a "Rumah Melayu", a traditional Malay heritage house.

The wetlands is open to the public from 8.30am to 7.30pm on weekdays and from 7.30am to 7.30pm on public holidays and weekends. It is closed on Mondays. On Sundays, anglers can also fish at one of the lakes for a fee.

The wetlands, encompassing a myriad of ecosystems, including mining land, peat swamps and lakes, can accommodate 1,300 vistors per day and is projected to receive over 200,000 visitors in the first year.

Meanwhile, Paya Indah Wetlands chief executive officer Muralee Menon announced that visitors to the park will pay discounted entry fees until the end of the year.

"This is in conjunction with the official opening and to encourage more visitors here," he said.

Also present were Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Khir Toyo, Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Ghani Othman, Malaysian consul to Botswana Tan Sri Dr Mohan Swami and member of the Malaysian Wetlands Foundation Board of Trustees Datuk Ahmad A. Talib, who is also New Straits Times group editor.

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