

02/02/2001

Putrajaya declared country's third Federal Territory

Ramlan Said

PUTRAJAYA, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today officially declared the new federal administrative centre of Putrajaya a Federal Territory.

The event, which will be documented in history as yet another one of the country's significant milestones, was witnessed by Malaysians from all walks of life.

The rapid development seen here today - from only a rubber and oil palm estate known as Prang Besar estate four years ago - is a testimony of the nation's commitment towards attaining Vision 2020.

It is the third federal territory after Kuala Lumpur and Labuan.

In a brief ceremony at Dataran Perdana, Dr Mahathir said the agreement with the Selangor Government on the alienation and creation of Putrajaya was signed on Nov 7 last year.

"In pursuance of the execution of the agreement, I, in the name of Allah the most merciful and compassionate, hereby declare today, Feb 1 2001 coinciding with 7th Zulkaedah 1421 Hijrah, the Federal Territory of Putrajaya encompassing areas as indicated in gazetted plan No. P.P 2-2000 be established."

"I pray that it will remain as the administrative centre of an independent and sovereign Malaysia," he said.

At present, Putrajaya has 26 administrative blocks, with another 42 to be ready by 2003. To date, its population has reached 7,250 comprising 1,450 families. The 1,500 housing units now are expected to increase to 67,000 by 2010.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir said Putrajaya would spur development in the neighbouring areas with the building of infrastructure, commercial centres and social facilities.

In Malaysia, instead of just one house or a row of shops, he said it was common to build new townships and redevelop old towns like Petaling Jaya, Subang Jaya, Shah Alam, Puchong, Serdang, Bandar Baru Nilai, Bandar Muazam Shah and others.

"Their development has not caused any party to lose out - not the Government and the private sector. All reap profits and benefits.

"As business activities are more concentrated in urban areas, many people are able to get jobs and business opportunities.

"This results in higher income for local authorities and for the State and Federal Governments, which are channelled back to the people in towns and elsewhere through public development projects."

The rapid development in towns had in fact contributed immensely to economic growth.

Replying to critics of the development of Putrajaya, Dr Mahathir said it was not built for present Government leaders.

"We do not want to see that every time a new person assumes the leadership, a new house or, even worse, a new capital is built.

"Putrajaya is for all leaders in future, leaders of a country which has attained a high level of development and one that will become a developed nation, God willing."

On the contention that the Government was indulging in wastage by building Putrajaya, the Prime Minister said this could only be true if it overspent and needed to borrow money to build something useless.

"Actually, the development of Putrajaya, KLIA and other big projects

have not affected the country's financial standing.

"That's why only Malaysia was able to revive its economy without having to borrow from the IMF, after being attacked by rogue currency traders.

"We used our own funds to restore the economy, have not neglected in paying our debts while continuing with development programmes," he said, adding that the Government had been able to increase salary, pay bonus, overcome poverty and continue providing various infrastructure projects.

Dr Mahathir said if there was wastage, the country's financial situation would be problematic and critical.

If the Government had succumbed to its critics, today there would be no Penang Bridge, North-South Expressway, national car, KLIA, Putrajaya and other projects.

"Remember, when foreigners criticise us, they are frustrated because they did not get these projects. Malaysians who echo such criticism are only allowing themselves to be their tools.

"The time has come for us to give priority to national interest and rejecting foreign instigation."

Dr Mahathir said Putrajaya might "look big today", but in the future it would be seen as small.

He said like most other countries, Malaysia needed some symbols, a capital that could be identified with the country.

"Of course KL is identified with the country but it was a pre-Independence capital... it will (now) be the commercial centre while this (Putrajaya) will be the administrative centre. I hope they will never change the capital again."

The Prime Minister said the Government did not borrow money to build Putrajaya which only took a small amount out of the national Budget.

"We are very careful about our finances. People may think we waste money but it is not so, we control the amount of money spent. That is why our reserves have increased.

"At the same time, we still have money to continue with this project." Like all housing projects, he added, Putrajaya, with thousands of hectares of its area allotted for housing, would generate "a lot of money", adding that there would be a scramble if it was awarded to the private sector.

Meanwhile, in a separate Press conference earlier, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Putrajaya could not be considered a wasteful project. "It will act as a catalyst to spur further development."

On calls for elections of councillors for local authorities to be re-introduced, including in the Federal Territories, Abdullah said there was no plan to do so.

He said the administration of Putrajaya would be similar to Kuala Lumpur and Labuan.

(END)