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Splashing comeback

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TEH Soon Seng used to make corporate headlines in the 1990s. In the heyday of the 1993 bull run, he was the darling of stock market punters when shares of his Aokam Perdana Bhd raced to dizzying heights.

Now, the businessman has set his sights abroad. He has since gone into property development and the leisure business in China, and is making a big splash there. His new vehicle is Golden Plus Holdings Bhd (GPHB) which is tapping into Shanghai's 1.8 million population.

'Shanghai is a gold mine,' declared Teh, GPHB's managing director, to the Malaysian Press in China's largest commercial city recently, 'There are numerous and endless investment opportunities here. Malaysian businessmen should know how to explore the possibilities.'

GPHB is listed on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange's main board. Its core business currently is property development. In February, it sold off its quarrying and construction businesses to RMC Industries (M) Sdn Bhd for RM76 million.

It expanded its reach to Shanghai in the 1990s when it invested in a 24-hectare site in Min Hang, one of Shanghai's 16 districts.

Two years later, it started construction of Shanghai's hugely popular Dino Beach Water Theme Park (Dino Waterpark). The group is currently undertaking the Royal Garden development project that consists of luxury condominiums and townhouses adjacent to the theme park. The ventures are expected to contribute significantly to group profits by financial year 2004.

Teh encourages Malaysian businessmen to 'venture abroad, invest, and bring money back. If we only think within Malaysia it will be "I take your money, you take my money, and the money won't go anywhere".'

He says one key aspect to consider before embarking overseas is detailed market research, including a close look at the differences between business practices in the home country and the proposed new market. 'It is vital that a businessman looks at the financial and legal systems and understands the requirements before starting a business. Also equally important is to choose the right place, district and local government,' he says.

The Chinese Government has been encouraging foreign investors to help develop the country. On its part, it offers a hardworking and skilful population of 1.3 billion. There are few obstacles to setting up a business in China.

Teh says, 'We ensure our project features modern and advanced facilities. We cannot afford to project an image of inferior quality. We want to keep the Malaysian flag flying high, so it's not just about money.' Teh says more than US\$ 25 million (US\$ 1 = RM3.80) has been invested in the project.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who launched GPHB's Royal Garden sales and service centre in Shanghai recently, urged Malaysians to be more adventurous in seeking investment opportunities overseas. He commended GPHB for its China venture and its willingness to face hardship when it undertook the Dino Waterpark project, which has since become the biggest and most popular theme park in China.

Dr Mahathir was in the city to attend the 13th Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders' meeting. Also present at the launch was his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, International Trade and

Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, GPHB chairman Datuk Dr Zainal Abidin Mohd Ali, and Malaysian businessmen from both Malaysia and Shanghai.

The Royal Garden project will be developed in stages. Piling work for phase 1A, which is expected to cost RM200 million, will begin soon and is slated for completion by November 2002. The sales launch for phase 1A is scheduled for March next year.

Dino Waterpark has grown in popularity since 1996 and is contributing significant socio-economic benefits to Shanghai, Min Hang district and the surrounding areas. The park is said to have the biggest wave pool in China. Last year, the China national beach volleyball competition was held at the park's artificial beach.

The theme park operates in the summer between mid-June and September. It can cater for 8,000 people daily. Some 1.5 million people have visited the park in the last four seasons, with a daily average of 12,000 on weekdays and 25,000 on weekends. A major factor in the park's popularity is the rapid development of infrastructure such as highways and bridges in the city and surrounding areas.

Shanghai is China's largest economic and trade centre, with a comprehensive industrial base and a major port. It has good infrastructure and transportation system and is well known for its cosmopolitan nature.

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