

Petronas keeps flag flying high

Nst 28 APR 2002

A MALAYSIAN flag flies high in the Bahrain capital of Manama. This time it belongs to Petronas, the national oil corporation which last week had its two-floor office premises graced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The opening of the office signals Malaysia's serious commitment to look for new businesses in West Asia, spearheaded by Petronas with the full enthusiasm of its staff and management.

The office is located on the top-most floors of the National Bank of Bahrain Towers, giving occupants a splendid view of the blue ocean and major parts of the city. This is certainly not a coincidence, I thought.

Petronas president and chief executive Tan Sri Hassan Marican

and his staff also have a commanding view of the city from its headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, located, of course, at the tallest building in the world. Perhaps this symbolises the oil company's vision of things to scan the world's horizons for productive and meaningful ventures.

Bahrain has a capital of almost 700,000 people, with about a quarter million comprising foreign nationals working in several industries. Almost 100 per cent of the population are Muslims, living in a thriving business island regarded by many as the financial centre of the Middle East and a favourite playground of its neighbours.

Bahrain, like Malaysia, adopts a constitutional monarchy type of Government. But the monarch appoints his Cabinet and this has

PAHIT MANIS

By Ahmad A. Talib

served the country well.

Petroleum production and refining constitutes about 60 per cent of export revenue.

Rosli, one of the senior staff to be stationed in Bahrain, is ready to help keep the flag flying.

Having served in other Petronas operations overseas, Rosh seems very knowledgeable about his work.

But this is only to be expected since Hassan is known to be quite a taskmaster when it comes to getting the best from his colleagues. The national oil corporation was given two exploratory off-shore blocks in November last year, rep-

with tough work in Bahrain

resenting a major breakthrough in the Middle East.

While the panoramic view from the top of the tower can lull occupants into an easy and dream-like existence, I'm told that the off-shore operations won't be easy at all. Exploration will be done in shallow waters and this will be made more difficult with the presence of reefs.

An oil man I met yesterday said this would involve what the industry refers to as "directional drilling" so as to minimise the possible damage to the reefs. Given a choice, not many oil companies would want to be involved in such operations, but Petronas wants to prove a point, I guess.

With the official opening of its Kertih petrochemical complex in Terengganu in less than two weeks'

time, Petronas can be excused for feeling buoyant and brimming with confidence. A vision realised — this has been Petronas' rallying call and we wait with expectation for its first drop of oil from the Bahrain oilfields.

□ In July 1991, former editor of the *Star*, V.K. Chin, in his weekly column *Comment*, took to task the Foreign Ministry for some undiplomatic treatment of the media invited to accompany official and working visits of national leaders such as the Prime Minister and his deputy.

I've taken part in several of these trips. Such trips are not a holiday, especially when reporting or despatching stories back to our headquarters in Kuala Lumpur can be difficult due to time difference or troublesome telecommunication

lines.

Moving from one destination to another too can be a big problem, especially when we need to catch up with the rest of the official motorcade to be in time for the photo session or Press conference. But V.K.'s article, and the positive response of the ministry after the visit to Brazil, has made things better and more agreeable.

Wisma Putra, after close liaison with the Prime Minister's office, has put in place an arrangement that allows newsmen and television crew members to travel in the same motorcade as the rest of the official delegation.

This has been going on for quite some time and many of us are quite thankful for such logistics.

□ ahmad@nstp.com.my