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DR MAHATHIR-BINTULU

BINTULU TO BE DEVELOPED AS HEAVY INDUSTRIES HUB IN S'WAK

BINTULU, Dec 19 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said Bintulu, which is rich in natural energy resources like liquefied natural gas and hydro-electricity, would be developed as a heavy industries hub in Sarawak.

The prime minister said among the heavy industries which could be developed here is aluminium smelting and iron and steel.

"By 2007, the Bakun hydroelectric dam will be ready and will generate 2,400 megawatts of electricity. We want industries to use this energy resource," he said at the official opening of the RM385 million Bintulu airport here.

During the opening ceremony, a Malaysia Airlines Boeing 747-400 aircraft with 100 VIPs touched down smoothly at the airport.

To attract heavy industries to Bintulu, Dr Mahathir said the government was taking the approach of providing infrastructure and basic facilities first such as electricity supply.

"The Bakun project, for instance, has been criticised by various quarters in the West but we continued to proceed with the project because we don't want investors to ask first (for the facilities) before we built them," he said.

Dr Mahathir disclosed that there had been many enquiries from foreign investors to establish heavy industries in Bintulu.

In his speech, the prime minister also wanted Malaysians and national corporations to heighten their self-confidence in terms of their capability and help continue the country's development and increase its progress.

"If we had previously invited contractors from Europe, Japan and South Korea for local mega projects, our contractors are now being invited to undertake large overseas projects, including those in Europe."

Dr Mahathir urged local contractors to export their skills as this could also contribute to the nation's growth.

"We should be confident of ourselves more than the confidence of others in us," he said.

Commenting on Bintulu airport, Dr Mahathir was confident that it would use up its capacity within a short time.

"Bintulu airport is not just to provide convenience to locals and foreign tourists but also to foreign investors to see for themselves the economic potential of Bintulu so that they would be convinced to invest here."

Earlier, transport minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said the government was in the process of providing incentives to local scheduled airlines to introduce special fares to travellers.

"I am confident that they will introduce attractive fares next year," he said. -- BERNAMA

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