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Dr M launches Asia's largest hotel

GENTING HIGHLANDS, Sat. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday launched Asia's largest hotel, the First World Hotel, describing it as a forward-looking project.

He said the Genting Group's project, which would be the biggest hotel in Asia with 6,300 rooms when its second phase is completed, would contribute to the tourism industry.

"This is a forward-looking project. Malaysia wants its tourism industry to grow and projects like these contribute to growth," he said.

Dr Mahathir and his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali had earlier arrived at the rainbow-coloured hotel before they were led to the First World Plaza, a theme park adjoining the hotel, for the opening ceremony.

He signed an electronic plaque to mark the launch of the hotel and plaza.

Genting Group chairman Tan Sri Lim Goh Tong said the hilltop resort and entertainment centre had attracted 14 million visitors last year, including day-trippers.

This was an increase from 13.4 million visitors the previous year, he said in his speech read by group managing director Tan Sri Lim Kok Thay.

Foreign visitors, especially from China, India and the Middle East, had increased significantly, he added.

The First World Hotel and Plaza are together called the First World Complex, which cost RM1.2 billion. The hotel also houses the Genting International Convention Centre, which can seat 6,000 people, and has the largest pillarless ballroom in Malaysia.

The hotel opened in December 2000 with 1,000 rooms. When its second phase is completed, it will have 6,300 rooms.

Construction of phase two has not started, but Resorts World Bhd executive vice-president Lee Choong Yan had earlier said the group hoped to complete the second phase in 2005.

The hotel also boasts the longest reception desk with 32 check-in counters, a rainforest-lobby entrance and the country's largest cafe, Tropical Cafe, which can seat 1,338 people.

Dr Mahathir toured the plaza, a shopping-cum-theme park with 48 retail and 52 food and beverage out-lets, and two cineplexes.

The plaza also houses replicas of famous world landmarks, such as the Champs Elysees, Eiffel Tower, Times Square and Petronas Twin Towers.

It boasts attractions such as the Snow House, Ripley's Believe It Or Not museum, and the Genting Sky-venture, a free-fall skydiving simulator.