

09 MAY 2002

Mahathir-India

"NEW AND MODERN" WRITTEN ALL OVER MALAYSIA TODAY

By: Mahesh Prasad

NEW DELHI, May 9 (Bernama) -- Everything "new and modern" is found all over Malaysia today and one by one Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's Vision 2020 pieces are falling into place, the Indian financial daily, the Business Standard said.

An article on "re-inventing Malaysia," says Dr Mahathir's vaunted Multimedia Super Corridor, stretching between KL International Airport and the city is ready to propel the country towards its high-tech, knowledge-based future.

This 15 km-wide corridor, with its two brand-new smart cities of Putrajaya and Cyberjaya, is the nucleus around which the country is being transformed.

The writer, Barun Roy, says "A lot of Mahathir's recent efforts have gone into creating the infrastructure needed for this transformation. Clearly, developing a seamless transportation network is one of his top priorities. At KL Central, the airport express meshes nicely with a transport hub that links up the entire country by rail and road."

"By 2004, an 18KM, mostly underground monorail will link Kuala Lumpur to Putrajaya, Malaysia's new administrative capital, where lakes, wetlands and forests will cover nine times more land than buildings," he said.

Putrajaya, a massive \$15-billion project, he says "is supposed to be Malaysia's answer to the Silicon Valley. Designed for a population of 300,000 and equipped to handle all kinds of multimedia communications traffic, this is where the country's high tech future is being charted.

A multi-media university is already functioning there and over 200 information technology companies have set up shop. By 2020, the government hopes to have over 500 IT companies in Cyberjaya."

The author refers to Dr Mahathir's speech at a conference in Bahrain last month regretting that there was not a single Muslim nation among the world's developed countries and asserting that he wanted to change all that.

"His ambition, the author says, is to establish a scientific progressive and knowledge-based society that will be psychologically-liberated, secure, and industrially developed," he added.

There is, the author says, "a lot of emphasis in today's Malaysia on monitoring advanced foreign technology, and the government has an incentive programme to encourage Malaysian scientists working abroad to return home.

Computer science has been given the status of a full-fledged school at the Malaysian Science University (USM). A comprehensive science and mathematics programme is being developed for primary and secondary schools.

By July, a National Space Agency, along the lines of Nasa the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration, is expected to come into being to determine the country's needs in aerospace and satellite technology and to formulate a national space policy.

In his speech in Bahrain, the author says, Dr Mahathir "bluntly blamed Muslims' rejection of knowledge for many of their problems today. Without return to knowledge independent of religious laws, creeds and practices, Muslim societies wouldn't gain the ability to defend themselves."

This is what, says the author, "he is telling Malaysians too: espouse modern knowledge, pursue modern technology, build modern infrastructure, preserve a multiracial society, and be part of the international community."

"To begin at the beginning, the government has announced it will be re-training 30,000 teachers as part of a new initiative to promote English in primary and secondary schools."

The article begins with the 57-km long airport express rail link from KL International Airport to the Kuala Lumpur Central Station.

"The brand new KLIA Express, as the train is called, is one more step towards Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's goal of building a new and modern Malaysia.

"Only five other cities in the world -- Tokyo, Hong Kong, London, Oslo and Stockholm -- have similar dedicated air-rail links, and going by first impressions, Malaysia is already a winner," the author adds.

-- BERNAMA

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