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Tioman's development not at environment's expense

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PULAU TIOMAN, Sun. - The development of Pulau Tioman as a duty free island will not be carried out at the expense of the environment, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has said.

According to Rompin Member of Parliament Datuk Dr Jamaluddin Jarjis, the Prime Minister wants the natural beauty of the island to be protected and the development not to affect the environment.

Dr Mahathir and his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali had arrived here on Friday after a visit to Terengganu.

Jamaluddin said Dr Mahathir gave a few tips on how the island should be developed.

Pulau Tioman, regarded as one of the 10 most beautiful islands in the world, will officially become a duty-free island on Sept 1.

Jamaluddin said the Prime Minister wanted the forest, marine life and corals, which are the island's main attraction, to be protected.

Dr Mahathir also revealed the Government's development plans for the island which include upgrading the existing airport, building a marina and a breakwater, improving the road network and educational facilities.

"Pulau Tioman is regarded as the `Langkawi of the East Coast' and we are glad that Dr Mahathir has given his personal attention to its development," Jamaluddin said.

Currently, the number of tourist arrivals is limited due to the low capacity of the airport.

Jamaluddin said that as the airport would be a major gateway to Pulau Tioman, expanding the airport would allow bigger aircraft to land on the island. A proposal to extend the runway is being considered.

Another proposal to reclaim the area around the island was set aside because it would affect the marine life and corals, added Jamaluddin.

Jamaluddin said the Prime Minister also wanted the villagers to benefit from the island's duty-free status.

He wanted a proper road network to link the island's main town, Tekek, with other villages such as Juara, Mukut and Genting.