

16/06/2003

A tyro's journey east

BINTULU! WHERE WAS THAT? Many would be hardpressed to guess its exact whereabouts the first time as it is not exactly the most-visited location for most Malaysians. I was informed that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad the Prime Minister himself was going to inaugurate the official opening of the Petronas MLNG Complex and I was invited to attend as a guest. This was no ordinary occasion as the Bintulu complex was the world's largest. Having just completed my first-month `s Securities Commission Capital Market Graduate Training Scheme, this was a good chance to see corporate Malaysia in action. Yes, I do now know exactly where Bintulu is now.

The day arrived and I made my way to the KLIA where I met up with a couple of Petronas personnel and a number of journalists making the trip. There was a one-hour stopover in Kuching and since this was the height of the SARS scare, there were a number of airport personnel as well as fellow travelers who wore surgical masks like some piece of fashion accessory. Curiously, I had to undergo Immigration clearance - and I thought this was a domestic flight!

Landing in Bintulu was like coming home - the terminal looked like a junior copy of the KLIA, complete with slinky silver columns and sweeping ceiling lines. I spied a shiny Gulfstream G4 parked in the apron with the Petronas teardrop logo adorning the fuselage. No prizes for guessing who their pampered passengers were.

Having time to kill I took in the sights of Bintulu and ended up buying a couple of kilos of snakeskin fruit (buah salak) from the town's pasar malam. That's about as adventurous as I got in sampling the local fare.

The official opening took place the next day. It was a grand affair which was conducted in a cavernous makeshift covered cavern complete with airconditioning. The most memorable gimmick was a model helicopter made to land within the canopy delivering a can of Bintulu gas!

The Prime Minister later gave a press conference attended by the media, praising Petronas' efforts at developing Malaysia's oil and gas wealth. He went on to comment on the Euro's strength and its implications for Malaysia. All in all, a wonderful experience and great eye-opener for me.

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