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Alor Star stays as administrative capital, says MB

ALOR STAR, Sun. - Alor Star will remain Kedah's administrative capital, Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain said today.

He said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had told him before leaving for Doha on March 5 the suggestion that Langkawi become the administrative capital had been made in jest.

The Prime Minister had, on March 1 at the launch of Phase Two of the Langkawi Underwater World, said the island was capable of taking over from Alor Star as it was "far more developed".

Syed Razak said development in Alor Star was hampered by being surrounded by padi fields. The State, the nation's rice bowl, could not allow agricultural land to be developed as it would affect rice production.

Furthermore, the preservation of this land was part of the condition imposed by the World Bank over its loan to the Muda Agriculture Development Board (Mada), he said.

"We can still develop the land but we have to replace it with land outside the Mada area, as we have done in the case of 1,200 hectares of padi fields in Kuala Kedah."

Syed Razak said although Alor Star might look under-developed, there were a number of development projects taking place.

"There is the project to upgrade the Sultan Abdul Halim Airport in Kepala Batas to allow the Airbus 330 to land.

"Also, we are carrying out the Mini Putrajaya project in Anak Bukit, which will house all Federal Government departments and agencies," he said after attending a dialogue with 166 People's Religious Schools teachers at the Umno headquarters in Bangunan Tunku here.

He said Berjaya Group Bhd would begin construction of a five-star hotel here next month.

"We hope this will put an end to discussions on whether Langkawi should be made the administrative capital.

"Langkawi is part of Kedah, but it only has a population of about 60,000 while the mainland has 1.54 million people.

"Although it has seen a lot of development, it will remain an island with tourism as its main activity while Alor Star will be the administrative capital," he said.