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PM: New airport in Tioman to benefit islanders and the nation

PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the Government decided to build a new airport in Tioman for the future benefit of the people there and Malaysia in general.

Stressing that the development of Tioman must be implemented without harming the natural environment, the Prime Minister said a small portion of the island has to be sacrificed for the development of the new airport so that more people could enjoy the beauty of Tioman.

"We don't wish to see development resulting in the destruction of plants and vegetation, the beaches and coastline and the marine life in waters off the island, reputed to be one of the most beautiful islands in the world.

"All these have to be preserved properly because tourists are attracted to Tioman island because of this. However, it is also necessary for us to build the proper infrastructure so that people could travel here at ease," he said in his speech through video-conferencing during the ground-breaking ceremony at the site of the new airport on the island, at Kampung Paya.

Dr Mahathir said that the government has allocated more than RM100 million for the construction of the airport which would further enhance tourism and directly improve the income and living standards of the Tioman island residents.

The new airport, designed to accommodate bigger aircraft like the Boeing 737, will facilitate travel to the resort island, which now has an airstrip at Kampung Tekek.

"The beauty of Tioman would be meaningless if it cannot be enjoyed by more people. As such, we have to make a little sacrifice affecting a small part of the island to build the airport so that the greater part could be enjoyed by more visitors."

Dr Mahathir said that Tioman has also been accorded duty-free status, thus directly benefiting its residents who could enjoy much cheaper prices for goods and services.

"I hope the people would enjoy the benefits, as experienced by the people in Langkawi. Previously, Langkawi was filled with wooden dilapidated houses but today the standard of living is very high. I am confident Tioman island could be developed rapidly and the residents could benefit more from its development," Dr Mahathir said.