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## KL Convention Centre launched

Chok Suat Ling

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today, is expected to host its first event in 2005.

It is set to be another distinct landmark in the city with facilities designed to attract international and regional conventions, exhibitions, sporting events and private functions.

Dr Mahathir said the centre, on a 28,347 square metre site within Kuala Lumpur City Centre, would also feature a walk-through aquarium called Aquaria@KLCC.

It is expected to further boost KL's stature as a well-planned and well-equipped modern city.

Dr Mahathir said the centre will help the Kuala Lumpur City Centre fulfil the needs of a cosmopolitan city.

"We are now a very well developed city capital. It (the centre) is much needed for a city the size of Kuala Lumpur.

"It is difficult at times to secure a venue for functions ...all venues are sometimes fully occupied and people have their events delayed because there is no suitable place," he said at the launch of the centre at the Mandarin Oriental Kuala Lumpur.

"The convention centre will help ensure there are more places to hold social and official events. We need it to cater to the demand from both the local and foreign markets. We would also like to play host to more international gatherings," he said.

The convention centre is owned by Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre Sdn Bhd, a wholly-owned subsidiary of KLCC (Holdings) Bhd.

Dr Mahathir said the convention centre would also help contribute towards the enhancement of the city's architecture.

The Prime Minister added, however, that there should be ample facilities, like parking spaces, for the large crowds expected at KLCC when the centre opens.

"By the time it is completed, the economy would have fully recovered ...the convention centre will be hosting many gatherings. This is our hope, of course, and we have to look at our internal strengths to overcome the problems posed by declining economies of the world.

"But despite all the uncertainties, I feel certain of the success of the convention centre."

At a Press conference later, Dr Mahathir was asked whether there would be a glut of convention centres in Kuala Lumpur when the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre opened its doors.

He said this would not be so as there was an increasing demand for places to hold functions.

"Kuala Lumpur is growing. It is difficult to find places to hold functions. In those days, people largely held their weddings at home, but now they have it in hotels. So all this is very necessary."

Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre Sdn Bhd chairman Tan Sri Mohd Hassan Marican said the convention centre would be a major activity generator complementing the rest of the KLCC development.

The convention centre, together with the existing Mandarin Oriental Kuala Lumpur and the shopping and entertainment facilities at the Suria KLCC complex provide an integrated precinct that can cater to the needs of international and local convention and exhibition centre delegates.

"The centre will comprise 110,000 sq ft of columnless exhibition space, a 3,000-seat plenary hall, a 500-seat theatre, a grand ballroom which can accommodate up to 2,500 people, a banquet hall, and conference and meeting rooms which can cater for conferences, weddings and other events.

"There is retail space for food outlets, family restaurants, cafes and travel agencies. The centre will also be equipped with wireless, telecommunication and digital audiovisual facilities with a satellite link to cater for offsite presenters."

He said the project would be ready for a soft opening by the end of 2004 and host its first international event in May 2005.

"A 600-room convention hotel will also be built within the complex. The other exciting feature of the convention centre will be a walk-through aquarium with more than 3,000 tropical marine species.

"To be called Aquaria@KLCC, this aquarium will be owned and operated by New Zealand-based Aquawalk International Limited. Aquaria@KLCC will promote education and entertainment through interaction with the environment."

According to Hassan, the convention centre would have architectural features inspired by traditional Malaysian architecture.

"Its futuristic features are in line with the centre's aim of establishing itself as a new benchmark for convention and exhibition venues in the country."