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MB: View PM's suggestion on new capital in proper perspective

LANGKAWI, Sun. - The Prime Minister's suggestion that Kedah consider making Langkawi its new administrative capital should be viewed in the proper perspective, Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain said.

Syed Razak said he believed that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad made the suggestion to reinforce the point that the Government had turned the island into the most developed part of the State.

Syed Razak said it was the Prime Minister's passion and determination to develop the island that has made Langkawi a world-renowned location today.

"The Prime Minister made the suggestion after realising how far Langkawi has progressed, especially in the past 10 years which saw the island recording the most rapid pace of development," he said last night after the launch of the month-long nationwide Mega Sale Carnival at Pekan Kuah here.

The Prime Minister made the suggestion when speaking at a ground-breaking ceremony of the Underwater World Langkawi's Phase II project in Pantai Cenang yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said the island was capable of taking over from Alor Star as it was "far more" developed.

Kota Star district officer Datuk Ahmad Abdullah explained that the State Assembly's approval was needed to shift the administrative capital from Alor Star to Langkawi. It would also have to be referred to the Sultan of Kedah.

Established in 1735, Alor Star is one of the oldest towns in Malaysia with a current population of over 370,000. Kota Star, the district in which Alor Star is located, has six small towns apart from the State capital. In terms of population growth, however, Alor Star is far behind some other economic centres in the State such as Langkawi.

Kota Star's population grew by 24 per cent from 1980 to 2000, while Langkawi's population increased by 158 per cent to over 70,000 residents.

Kota Star covers 666 square km while Langkawi's land area is 478.5 square km.

Dr Mahathir's proposal was well-received by the local business community here.

Langkawi Duty Free Traders Association chairman Arshad Desa said the island, which had already been accorded "tourism destination" status, would make an ideal administrative capital for Kedah.

Pas, however, was against the proposal, describing it as "impractical" and "burdensome" to the people of Kedah.

The party's information chief, Azizan Abdul Razak, said it would be a hassle to travel to Langkawi by ferry for government matters.