

MAHATHIR-TOURISM

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PULAU PINANG, SEPT 19 (BERNAMA) -- DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD SAID TODAY THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN MALAYSIA HAS SHOWN POTENTIAL FOR STEADY GROWTH HARDLY EIGHT MONTHS INTO VISIT MALAYSIA YEAR 1990.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THE NUMBER OF TOURISTS FROM ABROAD CONTINUED TO INCREASE OVER THE YEARS AND HAD SHOT UP TREMENDOUSLY THIS YEAR.

IN THE FIRST EIGHT MONTHS OF THIS YEAR, THEIR NUMBER REACHED 4.68 MILLION, HE SAID WHEN OPENING THE EQUATORIAL HOTEL IN BUKIT JAMBUL HERE.

+THIS MEANS THE TARGET FOR VISIT MALAYSIA YEAR, THAT IS 4.3 MILLION TOURISTS FOR 1990, WAS ACHIEVED IN LESS THAN EIGHT MONTHS,+ HE SAID.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THAT IN THE FIRST EIGHT MONTHS OF THIS YEAR THE FOREIGN EXCHANGE EARNINGS ROSE TO \$2.74 BILLION, AND WERE EXPECTED TO REACH \$4 BILLION BY THE END OF THE YEAR, FAR EXCEEDING THE ESTIMATE FOR VISIT MALAYSIA YEAR. -- MORE

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THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THE TOURISM INDUSTRY WAS A +GOLD MINE+ FOR MALAYSIA, AND ADDED THAT THE PEOPLE AND COUNTRY COULD DERIVE BENEFITS FROM IT.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THAT THOUGH THE NUMBER OF TOURISTS HAD EXCEEDED FOUR MILLION, THE COUNTRY HAD THE CAPACITY TO ATTRACT MANY TIMES THAT FIGURE.

HOWEVER, HE SAID, MUCH REMAINED TO BE DONE TO KEEP THE TOURISTS COMING.

ONE OF THE SHORTCOMINGS WAS THE LACK OF MODERATE AND CHEAP ACCOMMODATION SUCH AS CHALETS, MAND. MODERATE HOTELS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE BUDGET TRAVELLERS.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THE SHORTAGE OF MODERATE AND CHEAP ACCOMMODATION HAD DRIVEN SOME HOTEL OPERATORS TO RAISE RATES, NOT REALISING THAT THIS WOULD ONLY SERVE FOR SHORT-TERM PROFITS AND WOULD BE DETRIMENTAL IN THE LONG RUN NOT ONLY TO THE COUNTRY BUT ALSO TO THE OPERATOR. -- MORE

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+THE PROFITS OF A HOTEL SHOULD BE TIED TO HIGH OCCUPANCY RATE. LOW ROOM RATES WILL RAISE THE OCCUPANCY RATE WHICH WILL EVENTUALLY RESULT IN BETTER EARNINGS FROM OTHER SERVICES SUCH AS FOOD AND BEVERAGE,+ HE SAID.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID HE HOPED THAT PRIVATE ENTREPRENEURS, PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO HAD LONG BEEN IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY, WOULD GIVE PRIORITY TO PROVIDING MORE MODERATE AND CHEAP ACCOMMODATION.

HE SAID THAT WITH THE AVAILABILITY OF MORE SUCH FACILITIES, THE GOVERNMENT WAS CONVINCED THAT THE HOTEL ROOM RATES WOULD BECOME MORE COMPETITIVE.

THE PRIME MINISTER GAVE THE ASSURANCE THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD CONTINUE TO STRIVE TO ATTRACT TOURISTS EVEN AFTER VISIT MALAYSIA YEAR, AND SAID ADEQUATE FUNDS WOULD BE ALLOCATED FOR THE PURPOSE.

THE GOVERNMENT WAS CONVINCED THAT THE TOURISM INDUSTRY COULD SPUR NATIONAL ECONOMIC GROWTH, HE SAID.

ALSO PRESENT AT THE OPENING OF THE \$60 MILLION 413-ROOM HOTEL WERE DATUK SERI DATIN PADUKA DR SITI HASMAH ALI, PULAU PINANG CHIEF MINISTER DR LIM CHONG EU AND INFORMATION MINISTER DATUK MOHAMED RAHMAT. -- BERNAMA