

20m tourists possible by 2000, says Dr M

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight Malaysia could attract as many as 20 million tourists in the year 2000 with correct planning and implementation.

He said the Malaysian population was expected to reach 20 million that year, and this target of one tourist per citizen in 2000 was not impossible to achieve if plans were managed in an orderly fashion.

Dr Mahathir said it was vital that the tourism industry be stepped up in view of the magnitude of income that could be obtained from it.

"For example, every year 25 million tourists visit Rome, and even if each of them spent only US\$1,000 (about M\$2,800), the foreign exchange earnings would amount to US\$25 billion (about M\$70 billion), which is more than our entire export earnings," he said.

The Prime Minister said that while Malaysia was not Rome, the 60 per cent rise in tourist arrivals to more than seven million this year showed the capabilities of the country.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at the "Malaysian Tourism Industry Night" organised by the National Tourism Council of Malaysia (NTCM). Also present were his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, and Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik.

Dr Mahathir also said tourism was a relatively

new industry to Malaysia, in terms of emphasis given by the Government and the private sector.

He said the Tourism Development Corporation was created immediately after Merdeka but was regarded as an accessory body and not given enough allocations.

Only when the Culture, Arts and Tourism Ministry was established and given high allocations for promotion purposes did the take-

off in the industry occur, he added.

Dr Mahathir said the lesson from this experience was that success could only be achieved if there was whole-heartedness.

"Money alone will not ensure success without commitment; in fact, commitment is more important than money because no matter how much money was allocated, it would never be enough," he said, adding that the use of alloca-

tions must, however, be maximised.

"We must not wait until there is enough allocation."

Dr Mahathir said that seen from one angle, the tourism industry brought more benefits to the country than other industries.

This was because in contrast with the manufacturing industry, for example, where imported components were used in the country's exports, there were no such foreign components in

the foreign exchange from tourist spending.

He said the tourism industry brought many benefits to all citizens, not only in the tourism service industries, but also in others such as through the supply of food, agricultural goods and vehicles.

The people should therefore treat tourists well because they would not only be helping themselves in the process, but also because it was part of Malaysian culture.

Dr Mahathir said if tourists felt that they were getting a raw deal, not only would they not come back but they would also influence those who had not been in the country before, against coming here.

Tourists should be charged appropriate prices because Malaysia wished to be known as a good but inexpensive tourist destination. This was possible because the cost of living here was lower than in advanced countries.

He added: "While the Government hopes that the private sector will play its role efficiently and wisely, the Government will not neglect its responsibilities.

"There are still hoteliers who have asked whether the Government will continue to encourage the tourism industry.

"I do not understand how this question can be raised when more than \$100 million annually has been allocated under the Sixth Malaysia Plan for this purpose."