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Help of ministries, NGOs sought to improve situation

MALACCA, Tues. - The Culture, Arts and Tourism Ministry is asking other ministries and Non-Governmental Organisations for suggestions to help the tourism industry which has been hit by the weakening ringgit and unfavourable economic conditions.

Its deputy director-general Datuk Tengku Alauddin Tengku Abdul Majid said the ministry had to seek their views to address the decline in the number of tourists coming to Malaysia recently.

"We must take remedial measures. That is why we need their opinion and feedback," he said.

Tengku Alauddin said the suggestions would be studied at the ministry's weekly meeting and if found to be viable, they would be brought up for discussion at Cabinet level.

Minister Datuk Sabbarruddin Chik had said the country might not achieve the target of attracting 12.5 million visitors by 2000 due to inaccurate media reports on the recent haze situation.

He had said although the extent of the damage to the industry had yet to be determined, initial reports showed that projection for tourist arrivals next year would be affected.

Tengku Alauddin said attacks on the ringgit and the move by the 34 US Congressmen who had drafted a resolution, calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Datuk Dr Seri Mahathir Mohamad over his alleged "anti-Semitic and anti-Jewish remarks" had left a negative impact on the country's tourism sector.

"(Datuk) Sabbaruddin is now in London, together with some ministry officers to explain to foreigners the truth on what is actually happening."

He said the ministry had formed a committee to check on tourism-related information about the country in the Internet and "if the committee feels the information is incorrect, we have to address it".

Tengku Alauddin lamented that despite the ministry's call to private companies to develop new tourism products, only a few of them had responded.

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