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Mahathir-Tourists

HOST MORE TOURIST ATTRACTIVE EVENTS, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

SHAH ALAM, Dec 20 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today more international events that can attract tourists and foreign participants should be organised in Malaysia.

The Prime Minister said the events should be worthwhile like the annual Le Tour de Langkawi, a world premier cycling event.

Speaking to reporters at a function for sponsors of next year's Le Tour de Langkawi here, Dr Mahathir said due to the currency problems facing the country more such events should be held in Malaysia to attract the locals.

"Our people cannot go abroad (because of the currency problem), so when they stay home there should be entertaining events.

"We want people to visit Malaysia through these shows and they must know Malaysia," Dr Mahathir said.

Earlier in his speech, the Prime Minister said events such as this year's Le Tour de Langkawi which received wide local and foreign media coverage had also made the world aware of the happenings in Malaysia.

He said through the media coverage, foreigners, especially tourists, were aware that Malaysia was now haze-free.

He said foreign tourists and participants of international events coming to Malaysia could now breathe clean air after the haze, which had enveloped most of the countries in Southeast Asia, disappeared recently.

On the cycling event, Dr Mahathir said the Le Tour de Langkawi could be on par with the Le Tour de France although both had their advantages.

"Why not... Although we are using the Le Tour de France as a model, the Le Tour de Langkawi is not that kind of a race. Here you are racing in a totally different environment.

"The hot climate in Malaysia makes the race more challenging for the participants. It (Le Tour de Langkawi) can grow as big as the Le Tour de France," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that as an international cycling race shown on television across Asia and Europe, the event had projected Malaysia on the global scene and to the forefront of sport around the world.

He said the Le Tour de Langkawi, of which he is the patron, had "matured" since it was mooted two years ago.

"More people have shown interest and there are also more sponsors," he said.

The prime minister said the event, which was initiated as an international sports tourism event, had now taken on a new character, an international character.

Its success was yet another proof of Malaysia's ability to successfully organise a world-class event, he added.

Dr Mahathir also thanked the sponsors for making the cycling event a success.

Le Tour de Langkawi 1998 is expected to start from Langkawi in February next year.

For 12 days, cyclists from all over the world will converge in Malaysia and pit their skills against each other in "Asia's Ultimate Challenge" for one of the richest purses offered in bicycle racing tours. The prize money for the last two tours was US\$400,000 each.

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