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Media urged to help bring back foreign tourists

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik said today the media should do more to help the Government convince foreign tourists that the haze episode was over.

He said the tourism industry was still affected although the situation in the country was back to normal.

"I was told by a hotelier in Langkawi three days ago that the industry was not doing well. Foreign tourists think the country is still covered in haze.

"I am not blaming anyone. No doubt, the Press has been helping us but they should do more to ensure the message reaches the target," he told reporters after presenting a cheque for RM23,692.91 from Umno to Yayasan Sarangbangun's president Edward Iblah Lim.

Yayasan Sarangbangun is a special foundation set up to help orphans and widows of former Moro National Liberation Front fighters in Mindanao, southern Philippines.

When pointed out that the ministry should play its role by informing the foreign media that the situation in Malaysia was back to normal, Sabbaruddin said: "We do not expect the foreign media like CNN (Cable News Network) to help us. They will not do it. We have to help ourselves."

Asked if the various tourism promotion boards and the Malaysian embassies abroad had been playing their role too, Sabbaruddin said "yes".

He also said Malaysia would be doing more to woo back foreign tourists at the World Trade Mart in London next month.

"Our tourism is definitely affected by the haze. There had been many cancellations (tour bookings); therefore, we have to do more."

Sabbaruddin said the extent of the impact would only be known when the ministry compiled its annual tourism statistics.

The report will be out by the middle of next year.

On the donation, Sabbaruddin, who is also Umno secretary-general, said the money was collected from delegates at last month's Umno general assembly.

Umno president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had asked party permanent chairman Tan Sri Sulaiman Ninam Shah to launch the donation drive during the assembly.

It followed an appeal from the foundation's representative in Malaysia, Ali Mamat, a Bernama news editor, to Dr Mahathir.

The foundation based in Zamboanga City, Mindanao, was founded by Edward in 1987 to help orphans and widows of MNLF fighters killed in the 28-year armed conflict between the MNLF and Philippine government troops.

The conflict ended with the signing of the peace agreement between the MNLF and the Philippine government last year.

Edward said there were currently 50,000 orphans and 10,000 widows in south Mindanao.

He said the foundation organised Islamic and Arabic classes for some 200 orphans and provided loans to widows to help them start small businesses.

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