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`Bad publicity caused 21pc dip in tourism revenue'

P. Selvarani in London

MALAYSIA'S tourism revenue has dropped by 21 per cent this year as a result of the negative publicity it received from the foreign media over the country's economic and political situation, Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Seri Sabbaruddin Chik said.

He said the loss of about RM2 billion in earnings from the sector meant that many hotel rooms remained unoccupied and some airline routes had to be terminated or have their frequency reduced.

However, although the Government is making every effort to counter this negative publicity through its websites, it could do little to influence the perception of the Western media especially those in the United States, Britain and Australia.

Sabbaruddin, who is also Umno secretary-general, said although Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had been interviewed by the foreign media on several occasions to correct this perception, his views were never accurately portrayed.

"Certainly, the Government is not favoured, especially by the American Press. They have never looked at Malaysia in a positive way. They are not happy with us because we do not do what they want us to do. So whatever we do is never right," he said during a dialogue on Thursday with Malaysian businessmen and representatives of Malaysian missions in Britain.

Sabbaruddin said the publicity was so bad that Malaysia had even been portrayed as a war-torn country which was not safe to visit.

He said it was also unfair for the foreign Press to equate the problems affecting Malaysia and Indonesia, adding that Malaysia was far ahead in terms of security and political stability.

During a dialogue with Malaysian students at Malaysia Hall later, Sabbaruddin said a new Deputy Prime Minister need not be appointed to replace Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as the post was not provided for in the Constitution.

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