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Great potential for Malaysia to become convention centre

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Despite the conventions and exhibitions industry facing a decline in revenue, the Malaysian Association of Convention and Exhibition Organisers and Suppliers sees potential in Malaysia becoming a centre of excellence for conventions and exhibitions.

Association president Steven Thong said although the revenue for the industry dropped by between 20 and 30 per cent this year due to the current economic slowdown, Maceos was working towards promoting the country to hold world-class conventions and exhibitions.

"This is because Malaysia can offer high-standard conventions, exhibitions and conference facilities complemented by excellent infrastructure including the new KL International Airport, enhanced port facilities and improved transportation systems," he said at the Mines Exhibition centre.

The revenue from exhibitions dropped to RM700 million this year compared with RM1 billion last year.

Thong said Maceos anticipated the exhibition industry to pick up as aggressive promotions were taking place in countries around the world.

"We expect a marginal increase of three or four per cent next year and we will continue with our continuous promotions to attract more international exhibitions," he added.

Thong said the association had set up marketing offices and had representatives overseas for this task.

"It is important that Malaysians realise the spin-off multiplier effect of more than eight times which exhibitions and conventions bring into the economy, benefiting side businesses such as stand contractors, advertising agencies, printers and retail outlets."

Thong, who is also Reed Exhibitions Sdn Bhd general manager, said the third Apec International Trade Fair '98 to be held at the Mines Exhibition Centre in Kuala Lumpur from Nov 13 to 16, demonstrated the country's capability in hosting internationally-renowned events.

To be officiated by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the fair is held in conjunction with the Apec leaders meeting (Nov 17 and 18) and the Apec Ministerial Meeting (Nov 14 and 15) here.

Thong said the association was confident that following the success of hosting the 16th Commonwealth Games, Malaysia can host world-class trade fairs and impress foreign tourists.

Country Heights Holdings group managing director Tan Sri Lee Kim Yew said the company would join Maceos' promotions' initiative to promote the country to become a top conventions and exhibitions centre.

"Malaysia can become a new destination for conventions as it has a lot of convention, exhibition and conference facilities such as the Putra World Trade Centre that can accommodate 21,400 people, the Mines Exhibition Centre (35,000), Sunway Pyramid (5,600) and Sabah Trade Centre (10,000)."

Lee said Malaysia was strategically-placed and more competitive price-wise compared with other countries in the region due to the cheaper currency exchange rate.

Themed "Enhancing Global Competitiveness Through Technology and Human Resource Development", the trade fair will focus on how new technologies and skilled manpower contribute to the dynamic development of Apec economies as well as products, technologies and programmes related to

"Emergency Preparedness".

The fair, which will occupy over 10,000 square metres of exhibition space, is expected to attract more than 20,000 domestic and international visitors.

Currently, more than 50 local companies including DRB-Hicom Group, Telekom Malaysia Berhad, Golden Hope Plantations, Renong Group, Southern Bank Berhad, Celcom Malaysia Sdn Bhd and Malaysian Sheet Glass Berhad, have confirmed their bookings for the trade fair.

Among the countries that have confirmed participation in Apec are Brunei, Canada, Chile, Hong Kong, China, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Mexico and Thailand and members-designate Peru, Papua New Guinea and Vietnam.

Australia, Papua New Guinea and Singapore have also booked exhibition spaces.

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