

08/11/1998

`Local media asked to counter negative reports'

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has asked the local media to counter negative reports on the country by the foreign media and through the Internet, Umno secretary-general Datuk Seri Sabbaruddin Chik said today.

Sabbaruddin said the Prime Minister said this at the party Supreme Council meeting last night which also discussed steps to be taken by Umno to counter the slander spread by certain quarters of about some Umno leaders.

However, apart from using the local media, he did not want to mention the strategy to counter negative reporting.

"If we tell you the strategy, then it will not be strategy any more," Sabbaruddin told reporters after officiating at the Malaysian Tourism Board Quality Day at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

Sabbaruddin who is also the Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister said reporting, especially on political development, had affected tourism, as indicated by low hotel occupancy.

He blamed this on, among others, coverage by channels like CNN and CNBC which had aired stories on street demonstrations as if they happened everyday.

"Continued coverage of the Cocksackie outbreak and haze problems (last year and early this year) had caused the number of tourists entering Malaysia to drop by some 50 per cent in January and February.

"It was not until April that the number of tourists picked up again to offset the loss of the previous months," he said.

Earlier, Malaysia Tourism Board director-general Datuk Dr Arshad Hashim in his Quality Day speech also touched on the foreign media's report on the Cocksackie and haze problem.

Touching on the economic problem, he said although it had made Malaysia cheaper to visit, the country had to contend with neighbours whose currencies were also devalued and thus had also become cheaper to visit.

The function also saw 86 MTB staff receiving awards for long service and three contractors receiving prizes for their contribution to tourism.

Twenty staff were given the excellence service award which comes along with a salary increase.

Nine received horizontal salary increments while 13 received vertical increments.

(END)