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PM wants tourism promotion to be intensified, new markets identified

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today directed the Culture, Arts and Tourism Ministry, the private sector, hoteliers and tour operators to intensify tourism promotion.

Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik said Dr Mahathir also wanted those in the tourism industry to look for new markets and redefine the existing markets.

"While looking for new markets, we also have to look for new ways of advertising such as showing more pictures, organising familiarisation tours, direct marketing and doing more advertising.

"Dr Mahathir has also asked the industry to look into promoting health tourism, which is non-existent in the country at this moment," Sabbaruddin told reporters after attending a special 90-minute meeting on tourism promotion with Dr Mahathir at the Prime Minister's Department.

"There are no advertisements on health tourism ... we should advertise our hospitals and show pictures. We have the facilities but they are not being utilised."

Sabbaruddin said the Prime Minister agreed that more tourism promotion was needed and would be looking into the possibility of increasing allocations.

"He said he will try ... I told him that more promotions and advertising meant more money," Sabbaruddin said.

This year, the ministry was given RM11 million for tourism promotion. It was RM46.4 million in 1988, RM33.8 million in 1989, and RM28.3 million in 1990.

Sabbaruddin said the allocations had become smaller due to the higher exchange rate now.

He said the ministry's allocations were among the lowest compared to other countries in the region.

Last year, Taiwan had US\$60 million (RM228 million) for tourism promotions; Hong Kong (US\$56 million); Indonesia (US\$5 million); and the Philippines (US\$28 million).

Sabbaruddin said Dr Mahathir emphasised the need for everyone to play their role in promoting publicity.

"The bigger hotels can contribute more and the Government can give bigger contributions," he said, adding that the private sector could also play their part by advertising the country on their own.

Sabbaruddin said that the adverse reporting by foreign media such as CNN and CNBC was not helping the country.

There was a slight drop in tourist arrivals from 7.1 million visitors in 1996 to 6.2 million last year while revenue also recorded a drop from RM11.2 billion in 1996 to RM10.5 billion last year.

Among the contributing factors for the drop were the spread of the coxsackie virus, the haze and later the economic slowdown.

"There should be a slight increase this year especially after the success of the Commonwealth Games," Sabbaruddin said.

Earlier in Langkawi, speaking to reporters after opening the 13th meeting of the Tourism Working Group of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, Sabbaruddin said advertising and promotions had become even more important now to counter adverse and false reports by the foreign media on recent political developments here.

"Despite the current financial constraints, funds have to be allocated

for promotional efforts overseas to woo more tourists, whose arrivals have declined of late."

He added that tourism promotion had to be carried out continuously even in already established markets.

On Langkawi, he said more promotions needed to be done to fill the more than 6,900 hotel rooms available on the island.

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