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`Ports must improve facilities to handle cruise liners'

THE Ministry of Transport yesterday directed all ports to make efforts to ensure they could handle world-class cruise vessels, to boost tourism.

Its Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, said ports incapable of handling mega-cruise vessels must improve their facilities.

"I intend to call for a meeting with port authority officers and port operators soon to discuss the matter. If we are to attract cruise liners to Malaysia, we must have the facilities."

Dr Ling said Penang, Langkawi, Port Klang, Kota Kinabalu, Tawau, Kemaman and Kuantan could handle such vessels but he was unsure of the rest.

"When these vessels call, they bring in passengers from all over the world. When they alight, it basically means revenue is coming into the country," he told reporters after the arrival of the First World Class Mega Ship in Asia - the SuperStar Leo - at the Star Cruise Terminal in Pulau Indah, Selangor.

Dr Ling said encouraging mega-cruise vessels to call at Malaysian ports would bring in revenue crucial in these hard times.

Citing an example, the Minister said if Miami, the centre for world cruise industry, could have an annual turnover of about RM7 billion, then Malaysia, whose ports work 365 days, should have a turnover of about RM2 billion.

"The active campaigns on the local ports, especially Port Klang, are showing results as many companies in Malaysia are using them for the import and export of goods."

The Ministry was also looking into roping in the trade commissioners of various countries who were stationed in Malaysia to get their companies to use local ports as well.

Dr Ling said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad would chair a meeting on Oct 31 at Putra World Trade Centre to explain to the port authorities, operators and users why Malaysians should use local ports.

Dr Ling said he had yet to ascertain the details and how many people would be attending the meeting.

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