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Tourism sector can expect renewed funding

THE tourism industry, which is suffering from lower tourist arrivals due to the economic downturn, can expect "renewed government and private sector funding".

A closed-door special meeting to promote tourism in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, chaired by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, was expected to consider this.

In Langkawi earlier, Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik said the industry needs fresh funding for long-term promotion.

He said Dr Mahathir, who is also First Finance Minister, recognises the need for an extensive tourism promotion to help the industry recover from the region's economic downturn.

"In fact, Dr Mahathir is chairing a meeting at 2.30pm and what the Prime Minister is going to tell us, I don't know... maybe on working with the private sector," he said after opening the 13th Meeting of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) Tourism Working Group (TWG).

Some 60 tourism officials including those from Australia, Indonesia and Singapore are attending the two-day meeting.

He said the private sector and the Government must work together. "We need support to revive the tourism industry and we need money for promotion as it should be done all the time, especially during tough times."

When opening the meeting, Sabbaruddin said there was a need for greater and more active cooperation among Apec member economies to alleviate the effects of the currency crisis, in particular through promotion of tourism in the affected economies.

He said Malaysia's capital controls may initially inconvenience tourists, but it should eventually facilitate tourism growth and economic recovery.

Sabbaruddin also said Malaysia supports the Apec objectives set out in the Seoul Declaration of November 14 1991, especially for all member economies.

Joint efforts should therefore be made to remove barriers to the flow of tourists and human resource development stepped up to ensure quality service.

Malaysia, he said, has accorded high priority on developing the tourism industry by working closely with the private sector.

It has however shifted the emphasis to marketing specific products, instead of merely promoting the country as a whole.

One strategy is to stage more international sports and recreation events, the minister said.

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