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LING-CRUISE

CRUISE LINER INDUSTRY, THE LATEST MONEY SPINNER FOR M'SIA'S ECONOMY

IPOH, Nov 23 (Bernama) -- Malaysia, which owns the fourth largest fleet of cruise liners, expects its new endeavour in the leisure cruise industry to be the latest money spinner for the country, apart from international sports events.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said the local cruise industry could offer a wide variety of food, culture, sun and fun for the international tourists.

Compared to the western cruise destinations, which were similar to one another, Malaysia and its Asean neighbours would be very attractive destinations for the international market, he said at the MCA candidates' meeting with the rakyat session here today.

Dr Ling said that the industry was one of the ideas mooted by the Barisan Nasional government, especially by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, to diversify the country's economy.

He said that the cruise industry in Miami, Florida, in the US could generate US\$7 billion revenue a year and "imagine if we could just bring RM1 billion to Malaysia."

Dr Ling said that the local ports had improved its facilities to handle cruise liners, and coupled with airports near the ports, international tourists could just fly and cruise to Malaysia and its neighbouring countries.

He said that when local company, STAR Cruise brought in its mega cruise vessel -- the Superstar Leo -- to Pulau Pinang, carrying 2,800 tourists, there were not enough tourist buses to ferry the tourists to tour the state.

The RM1.3 billion first World Class Mega Cruise vessel, which are among the 10 largest cruise vessels in the world, required 70 tourist buses to ferry its passengers, he said.

Dr Ling also said that international sports events such as the Commonwealth Games and the Formula One race had helped the government in promoting the country.

The government also hoped that the move to transform the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport (SASA) in Subang into an International Trade and Exhibition Centre (ITEC), would spur new activities to generate income for the country.

Under the 2000 Budget report, the government planned to develop six exhibition halls covering 34,400 sq metres and an open hall covering 130,000 square metres, which are expected to be completed by end of 2000.

To boost the place as an ITEC, the cabinet has agreed to turn the old international airport into a tax free exhibition area, he said.

He said that world international Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) are currently valued at US\$280 billion a year (US\$1=RM3.8), and if Malaysia could just get one percent of the value, it would be a good income for the country.

Dr Ling noted that about 12 years ago, Australia's MICE market stood at just A\$450 million (A\$1= RM2.4) annually, but now it has grown to A\$7.7 billion a year. -- BERNAMA.

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