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Spin-offs from cruise industry

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THE development of the local cruise industry has benefited not only the shipping industry but also sectors like tourism, hotel, souvenir shops and restaurants, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said yesterday.

"A few years ago, we did not have a cruise industry. With the development of the industry, the millions of ringgit generated be shared by all Malaysians.

"We now have the fourth largest cruise fleet (in terms of tonnage) in the world," he told a news conference after launching a Mandarin version of the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's latest book "The Way Forward", in Petaling Jaya yesterday.

"The Way Forward" is the Prime Minister's second book which has been translated into Chinese. The first was the "Malay Dilemma".

Ling said the Government encourages the development of the cruise industry by building the necessary infrastructure such as cruise terminals and other port facilities to allow cruise vessels to call at local ports.

"Imagine how much money the industry can bring in if one cruise vessel, carrying 2,800 passengers, calls at different ports in the country.

"To transport them to tourist spots in Penang, for example, we need about 70 buses," he said.

He said Malaysian cruise operators have an edge in the industry compared to their counterparts in Florida or Vancouver where they can only operate during summer.

Although Ling could not give the estimate of the local cruise industry, he said the operator in Florida has an annual turnover of US\$7 billion (US\$1 = RM3.80).

Another new business which has brought in a lot of money to the country within a short period of time is the Formula 1 motorsport racing.

He said the Formula 1 event, which is televised to about 3 billion people worldwide, is a good advertisement for the country.

It has also boosted the local tourism industry when the sport's enthusiasts from all over the world discover the beauty and attractions of the country.

"Take the Convention and Exhibition Centre which the Government is developing at the Subang Airport, for example. It is a tax-free convention centre and the only one in the world which has a (Boeing) 747 runway," he said.

Ling said the global convention and exhibition industry is worth about US\$280 billion.

If Malaysia can secure even 1 per cent of the global share of the industry, it will bring RM12 billion into the country.

The industry, he said will benefit many quarters including taxi drivers, hawkers, restaurants and local shops.

During the book launch, Ling also witnessed the signing ceremony between Rhythm Consolidated Bhd, the publisher of the book's Chinese edition, and its distributors in Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Rhythm Consolidated group executive chairman Tan Keng Chan said a total of 10,000 copies of the book have been printed, of which about 5,000 copies are for overseas circulation.

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