

We have the edge in tourism: Mahathir

LANGKAWI: The country's tourism industry can be more competitive than Singapore's due to its lower overheads, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today.

He said Malaysia and its duty free enterprises can be at a higher competitive rate with Singapore simply because the cost of living there is much higher.

"For example, a home in Singapore may cost S\$1 million (RM2.17 million) while in Malaysia, it is about RM300,000 which is a one-third difference," Mahathir said during a brief interview with a British-based international magazine-Duty-free News here today.

Mahathir said even Singaporeans are investing in properties in the country, adding that Malaysia intends to be as competitive as possible in the industry and towards this, the relevant authorities are also hoping to bring the retail prices lower.

On the lack of promotion about the country overseas, Mahathir said he agrees that the country is not doing enough but added that the nation had undergone a brief recession period and since it has now recovered, the government will put more effort.

Mahathir said people have also re-emerge to invest in the sector, adding that it is unfortunate that

foreign tourists do not know much about Malaysia.

"People don't know that Langkawi is a duty free zone. The entire island . . . 99 islands are duty free. That is the reason why we don't really have good shopping complexes that promotes duty free items," Mahathir said.

He added that another reason is that some operators tend to sell at higher price because their agents (middlemen) are in other countries.

"These agents imposed price restriction making us less competitive . . . we have to get around this problem," Mahathir said, adding that with the opening of the Oriental Village

here, the perception might change as the operators will import directly and sell it at better competitive prices because the cost of living in Malaysia is low.

While the country's wages scale may also be low, the consumer prices are also low so it is still affordable for people to shop, he said.

Mahathir also, spoke about the development of one or two islands in the east coast where the government would spend money on infrastructure development.

"We want Malaysia to not only be easily accessible, but moving around Malaysia would be very easy and there is no restriction. It is a safe country."