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Have quality tourism products, says PM

By EDDY LOK

KOTA KINABALU, Wed: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight called for quality tourism products and destinations to ensure that Malaysia will continue to profit from the potentially huge tourist industry.

"If in the past, efforts were merely on tourism development, the job now is to inject quality into the industry in areas like services, cleanliness and charges," adding that tourism remains an important revenue earner as it is still in the early stages of development.

The government has provided much resources to develop the sector, including developing facilities and infrastructure, he added.

"We should all continue to work to make the country popular with

tourists who would regard us as a safe, fun and attractive place to visit," he said when opening the Sutura Harbour Resort.

Mahathir said tourism, based on the environment-friendly concept, is one product which could attract tourists from around the world.

He cautioned, however, that environment-related tourism could draw brickbats, especially from the West, who often accused Malaysia of destroying the environment.

He called on those involved in eco-tourism not to be so motivated by profits that they turned a blind eye to the environmental needs.

He said the weak performance of the Malaysian tourism industry in 1997 and 1998 was due to the economic meltdown in East Asia.

Events like the dengue, Coxsackie B and cholera outbreaks also aff-

ected the industry Mahathir added.

However, positive indications have emerged with 7.93 million tourists visiting Malaysia and spending RM12.3 billion last year while hotel occupancy increased to 109,413 rooms compared with 107,791 in 1998.

Mahathir said sports tourism is another lucrative area and the government is serious about turning Malaysia into such a destination.

"We succeeded in holding the Formula One Race, Commonwealth Games in 1998, Le Tour De Langkawi, Kinabalu Mountain Run, Cameron Descent and other activities which are of world standard," he added.

New government efforts include a Malaysian campaign to bid for the right to host the Asian Games in 2006.