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Be responsible, says PM

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KOTA KINABALU, Wed. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has advised those intending to go into the development of eco-tourism to be responsible and mindful in the protection of the environment.

The Prime Minister said eco-tourism developers must not only think about making profit and forget the responsibility of preserving the country's natural beauty.

"We must protect the environment as it is an invaluable asset," he said at the official opening of the Sutera Harbour Resort here today.

Sprawled over 153ha, the resort comprises two five-star hotels, a 27-hole championship golf course, a modern marina and extensive sports and recreational facilities.

The development of the RM1.4 billion resort began in 1994 on a reclaimed area on the fringe of Kota Kinabalu city.

Dr Mahathir said tourism operators must maintain the good image of Malaysia as a safe, attractive and popular destination in the region.

"Promoting the country's natural beauty can be sensitive as it could spark criticism and allegations, especially from the West, that Malaysia has been destroying the environment.

"Issues related to cleanliness of water, river pollution, landslips and logging should also be taken into account in the development of tourist destinations."

The Prime Minister said efforts to promote domestic tourism must also be given attention.

Based on statistics, about 15 million domestic travellers are expected to visit Sabah this year compared to only 13.8 million in 1997.

He said local tourists must be kept abreast of new tourism products available in the country.

"Domestic tourism can be promoted by offering attractive packages."

Dr Mahathir also said in the era of globalisation, Malaysia must take advantage of information technology to promote its attractions.

"We must act fast and not have the 'wait-and-see' attitude, otherwise we will be left behind," he added.

Present at the function were Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Chief Minister Datuk Seri Osu Sukam, Sutera Harbour chairman Tan Sri Kamil Jaafar and its Chief executive officer Edward Ong.

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