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Editor's note

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SELAMAT pagi! I was in Jakarta for a few days accompanying Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on his two-day visit to Indonesia. Even though it was a short trip, it was a good opportunity to see parts of Jakarta again. The Indonesian government, realising that tourism has a lot of potential and is an important source of foreign exchange, appears to be starting all over again in tourism promotion. Once the riot-torn country regains its self-confidence, I'm sure its tourism industry will grow once more. At the moment, there seems to be a lull but before long Jakarta will see many more foreign tourists. Political stability can bring a lot of benefit to a country seeking foreign exchange by way of tourism revenue. In that sense, we're very fortunate to be able to enjoy greater political stability than our neighbour at the moment. Let's keep it that way. But political stability is not enough to guarantee earnings through tourism. While the Government has done much to maintain and promote political stability, others must play their part in making the stability last so that revenue, especially foreign money, keeps increasing. Indonesia, with political stability still a question mark in the minds of some observers, is already rebuilding its tourism industry with gradual promotional work. For the benefit of foreign guests and travellers, its television programmes are already screening tourist spots nightly to create awareness and raise viewer interest. Using this, the authorities are hoping that foreigners would be attracted to the country.

I'm not sure if our authorities are promoting tourism this way. I'm hoping the relevant authorities will do something similar. The TV programmes should not just be for screening locally but overseas as well. Showing our tourist attractions on foreign television can be a very effective way of attracting tourists. This means spending money, of course. But the authorities must look at this expenditure as an investment. Sending tourism promotion delegation abroad is fine, but I fear this will serve only a limited purpose. Interest in Malaysian tourism may be raised when the delegation is around but will soon be forgotten with delegations' departure. The authorities need to spend money wisely and television promotion can be used to maximise the impact of such promotional work. I'm sure that with a proper plan and guided by profit-oriented organisations, the promotion of Malaysia can organise the best Formula 1 race, the best Commonwealth Games ever and a host of other world-class events, I'm sure that tourism promotion overseas can be just as successful, if not more. We have to find new and more creative ways to attract others to our country. The private sector, which will benefit most from the influx of foreign tourists, must surely realise this. That being the case, it should be promoting tourism with vigour and aggression. When was the last time you hear of a joint public and private sector tourism mission overseas, one that is done with imagination, flair and creativity? Anyone interested in doing this?

Salams