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Have group tours four pupils

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight said more group tours should be organised for schoolchildren to enable them to appreciate their heritage and the country's history.

The Prime Minister said at present such tours, which could help cultivate a love for the country among schoolchildren, were not frequently held.

"As such, the Ministry (of Culture, Arts and Tourism) should organise such tours. In Japan for instance, children are taken in groups, not just to visit historical places, but also supermarkets and shopping complexes.

"This should be the focus of the Ministry so that children can be exposed to their heritage from a young age.

"This way, they will treasure their heritage, culture and the country's diversity."

He said this would help ensure the country's continued peace and the people's harmonious existence.

The Prime Minister was speaking at the launch of Malacca Tourism Festival 2000 (MTF 2000) at Persiaran Kuala Lumpur City Centre.

Also present were Dr Mahathir's wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali and Malacca Chief Minister Datuk Wira Ali Rustam. Dr Mahathir later launched two books - one entitled "Visiting Malacca Means Visiting Malaysia" and the other on "Meeting, Incentive, Convention and Exposition".

He also witnessed the signing of several memoranda of understanding to promote tourism and educational opportunities in Malacca.

On tourism, Dr Mahathir said it was important not just to attract foreign exchange but also to give foreigners a true perception of the country.

It was integral, he said, for foreign tourists to see the "real Malaysia".

"We know that Malaysia is not popular with the foreign media which always comes up with inaccurate reports of the country.

"If we read what they report about us, we might want to run away from Malaysia as it is portrayed as rife with demonstrations, trouble, and that tourists are not safe," he said, adding that some foreign tour agencies also made up such stories.

He said, however, that when tourists and businessmen came to the country, they always said it was not like what they expected.

"They believe Malaysia is underdeveloped, the people are quarrelling with each other, there are demonstrations, no roads and no infrastructure. But when they land at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport, they are awestruck as it is the most beautiful airport in the world."

He said when tourists travelled from the airport to the city, they would see that Malaysia's highways were comparable to that in developed countries.

When these tourists returned to their own countries, he said, they could become Malaysia's "ambassadors" and give the people the true picture.

"I always personally tell foreigners that when they visit Malaysia, it is as if they have gone to three countries - Indonesia, China and India - because of the country's multi-ethnicity and diversity."

On MTF 2000, Dr Mahathir said Malacca had many historical places of interest.

"It has many remnants of colonial rule like, for instance, the Portuguese fort and British buildings. Malacca used to be a sleepy hollow, but with development, it is now a hollow that is wide awake."

Some 60,000 visitors are expected to visit the six-day MTF 2000.

The festival will concentrate on popularising Malacca as a one-stop tourist centre to attract more tourists.

The festival is to promote Malacca not merely as a destination famous for its historical and cultural heritage but also for shopping, education, recreation, agro-tourism, sports, convention and health.

Local cuisine, cultural shows, seminars, workshops and daily lucky draws will be held.

A total of 92 companies are participating.

MTF 2000 is organised by the Malacca State Government and co-sponsored by Telekom Malaysia Berhad, Tenaga Nasional Bhd, DRB-Hicom Group, A' Famosa Resort, Kit Kat Nestle and United Engineering (M) Berhad.

The New Straits Times is the official newspaper for the event, while Takaful Nasional plays the role of the official insurance company.

The festival is open to the public daily from 11am to 10pm except on the final day where the exhibition will close at 6.45pm. Admission is free.

The festival is themed "Visiting Malacca Means Visiting Malaysia".

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