

27 JUL 2000

Mahathir-Eco-Challenge

SABAH, A HIDDEN TREASURE FOR TOURISTS, SAYS PM

KOTA KINABALU, July 27 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has likened Sabah to a hidden treasure with so many natural attractions for the rest of the world to enjoy.

He said tourists especially foreigners are welcome to come and see what Sabah and Malaysia are all about.

"Sabah has over 30 ethnic tribes and despite the diversity, they have been living harmoniously together," he said at a special ceremony to honour sponsors who contributed to the staging of the Eco-Challenge Sabah 2000 here today.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia especially Sabah would be better known with the staging of such a prestigious event.

He also said the Eco-Challenge offered an opportunity for anyone to test endurance, will and strength.

Earlier, Chief Minister Datuk Osu Sukam said the event was expected to draw more foreign tourists, especially Americans, given the wide media coverage from major cable and television networks such as Discovery Channel Canada and Entertainment Tonight.

He said 83,000 American tourists visited Malaysia over the past two years, bringing RM171.2 million in revenue to the tourism sector.

Of the number, 5,680 Americans visited Sabah, bringing in revenue totalling RM19.8 million to the state, he added.

During the ceremony, the prime minister presented tokens of appreciation to main sponsors of the event.

The main sponsors are;

- \* Yayasan Sabah with sponsorship totalling RM2.6 million;
- \* Telekom Malaysia Berhad (RM1.2 million);
- \* Sabah Air (RM1.2 million);
- \* Sutera Harbour Resort (RM600,000);
- \* UMW Toyota Motor Sdn Bhd (RM250,000);
- \* Sistem Televisyen Malaysia Berhad (TV3) (RM200,000);
- \* Semporna Ocean Tourism Resort Centre (RM60,000); and
- \* Zuma Engineering (RM57,000).

Created in 1992, the Eco-Challenge is a non-stop 24 hour a day race-cum-expedition over a rugged course of approximately 500km.

Each team of four, which must have at least one member of the opposite sex, is required to complete the race together.

If one person quits or is injured, the entire team is disqualified.

Eco-Challenge Sabah 2000 consists of several disciplines, including jungle trekking, river paddling, sailing, canyoneering and fixed ropes, diving, mountain biking and caving.

This year's race, from Aug 20 to Sept 2, will be the seventh. Past expeditions were held in various remote and exotic locations of the world.

Malaysia will be represented by two teams known as Team Sabah 2000 and Team Toyota 2020.

-- BERNAMA

HAK RYN