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Mahathir-Tourism

TOURISM SECTOR MUST BE SENSITIVE TO ENVIRONMENT ISSUES, SAYS DR M

KOTA KINABALU, July 26 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight urged various quarters who are keen on developing tourism products based on nature in this country to be sensitive to certain issues which could expose the country to criticisms from foreigners.

They should be sensitive to issues such as water cleanliness, river pollution, landslides and illegal logging when planning the development of a particular tourist destination, the Prime Minister said.

"We are aware that efforts to market nature as a tourist attraction is highly sensitive and will provide opportunities for criticisms and allegations, particularly from the West, that we are destroying nature," he said when officiating the Sutera Harbour Resort, a major resort centre here.

"Thus, anyone intending to develop eco-tourism projects must adopt a responsible attitude and be sensitive towards environment conservation," he said.

The resort, located on a 156-hectare site and approximately a five-minute-drive from the city centre, has two five-star hotels, golf course, marina, conference and exhibition centres as well as recreational facilities.

Besides the resort facilities, Sutera Harbour, which was also launched by the Prime Minister in July 1994, would also provide luxury residential units.

Dr Mahathir said the government would continue to ensure that the tourism industry was managed based on the concept of sustainable development and at the same time explore other fields which could be turned into tourism products.

"The tourism industry is very wide and is not confined only to holidaying and relaxing activities, in fact it covers other activities which may be considered by some people as having no connection whatsoever with tourism," he said.

An example, he said, was sports tourism which yielded lucrative returns and benefited not only the organisers but also the country.

As such, various international sporting events had been organised in the country including the Formula One Race, Commonwealth Games, Le Tour de Langkawi cycling race, World Mountain Running Trophy and so on.

According to Dr Mahathir, the government was also endeavouring to tackle problems which could hinder the growth of the country's tourism sector such as the financial crisis in 1997 and 1998 as well as several other incidents such as the haze which had affected tourism revenue.

As a result of these efforts, tourist arrivals into the country had increased to 7.93 million last year compared to 5.55 million in 1998, he said.

"The tourism sector also generated RM12.3 billion in 1999 compared with RM8.58 billion in 1998 while room capacity also increased to 109,413 rooms last year from 107,791 in 1998," he said.

Dr Mahathir also outlined the national tourism promotion strategy which started in 1990 with efforts at promoting general awareness that Malaysia was a tourism destination, followed by promotions based on events such as the Visit Malaysia Year and later promoting the country's unique selling point.

The latest strategy is to emphasise on the richness of the culture of the multi-racial communities in the country through the "Malaysia - Truly Asia" campaign, as well as the emphasis on the tourism sector in the states.

Also present at the ceremony were Chief Minister Datuk Osu Sukam, state

cabinet ministers and heads of federal and state departments.

-- BERNAMA

JS HAK AO