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`Malaysia must do more to attract tourists, students avoiding West'

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Malaysia must put in extra efforts to attract tourists and students who have kept away from the West due to the recent terrorist attacks in the US.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tourists, especially those from Islamic nations, were now reluctant to travel to Europe or America, fearing repercussions.

Refuting claims that tourist arrivals in Malaysia might drop drastically, Dr Mahathir said the numbers from the United States and Europe might drop but they did not account for the large numbers of in-bound tourists. He said this in an interview aired over TV1 tonight.

He said those who came in large numbers were from Asean, Japan, China and India.

He said efforts must be made to increase visits by tourists from these countries because they would not go to Europe or America this time around.

On the emphasis on recent efforts to promote tourism among Islamic nations which gave the impression that tourists from the West were ignored, Dr Mahathir said it was a wrong to perceive that the campaign for tourists from Islamic countries meant that Malaysia did not want tourists from non-Islamic countries.

"We want them (Western tourists) to come but we need to increase efforts to attract tourists from Islamic nations too," he said.

Besides increasing the number of tourists, Dr Mahathir said attracting foreign students to further their studies in Malaysia had also contributed to the country's economy.

"We have 15,000 foreign students and we can consider a student who studies in Malaysia as 360 tourists who come for a day, because they stay here not only for one or two days but one, two years."

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