

# Industry 'uses' PM to counter travel alerts

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KUALA LUMPUR: The tourism industry has included Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as part of its "arsenal" in the fight to dissuade foreigners from cancelling travel bookings to Malaysia.

Associations of Hotel Employers president Datuk Azman Shah Harun said the tourism industry, which had been seriously undermined by certain western countries on the pretext of combating terrorism, was bracing itself for more cancellations following the issuance of travel advisories against visiting the country.

However, he added, industry players were also taking concrete steps to combat this trend.

"Several tourism authorities are now collecting local and foreign newspaper cuttings on Dr Mahathir's speeches and statements in which he exposed some of the dirty tactics used to damage the tourism industry in Malaysia and other Asean countries.

"These statements will be copied and forwarded to the market sources themselves as well as countries where travel advisories have been

issued," he said in an interview on Wednesday.

Besides the United States, other countries which have issued travel advisories to their citizens are Australia, Germany and Canada.

Azman said various articles on Dr Mahathir's beliefs and stand on the fight against international terrorism would throw some light on what was going on in the world and "educate" key tourism players in countries suspicious of Malaysia.

"We will focus on foreign sources and allow their key tourism players to explain to the market why they should ignore the recent advisories naming Malaysia as a country not to be visited," he said.

Last week, Dr Mahathir had said the latest warnings by the United States on the possibilities of terrorist attacks in Malaysia could amount to economic sabotage.

His deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, said on Tuesday that many other countries still thought Malaysia was a safe place to visit and for investment and dismissed travel advisories as something "unacceptable" for Malaysia.

Association of Tours and Travel Agents president Tunku Iskandar

said the association has compiled statements made by Dr Mahathir on the terrorism issue "from day one."

"We have asked our members to use these statements when they want to communicate with their counterparts in other countries in relation to tourism," he added.

However, Tunku Iskandar said any "fighting back" must be based on facts.

"We will address the issues according to what the advisories said.

"If they say that some islands in Sabah are not safe, we will give them the actual size of our security forces deployed to protect tourists against any eventualities," he said.

He said the association was also looking at some "third country" comments about how safe Malaysia was for tourists.

"We have a few and will be using them together with whatever we have by Dr Mahathir," he said.

Tunku Iskandar added that Malaysia must set up a "crisis management" team to address pressing problems such as the travel advisories or the effects of incidents like the Sept 11 tragedy on tourism.