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Sipadan-Sabah

SABAH TOUR OPERATORS WELCOME ICJ RULING ON SIPADAN,LIGITAN

KOTA KINABALU, Dec 18 (Bernama) -- Tour operators and key players of Sabah's tourism industry have welcomed the World Court's ruling that Sipadan and Ligitan islands belong to Malaysia while state officials expressed confidence that ties with Indonesia will remain strong.

They also expressed relief that the territorial dispute had been peacefully settled thus putting to rest any lingering uncertainties over the status of the two islands.

Sipadan Dive Centre Director Datuk Douglas Primus Sikayun said although he himself had never doubted that the two islands belonged to Malaysia, visitors did sometimes ask about their "ownership."

"On behalf of Sabah tour operators we congratulate the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the Malaysian Government on their successful handling of the case," he said.

Sipadan Dive Centre is one of the main tour operators to Sipadan, bringing tourists on a daily basis. It also owns chalets on the island that provide divers with overnight facilities.

Another tour operator Clement Lee, who is the director of Borneo Divers and Sea Sports, echoed Primus's statement.

He commended both the Malaysian and Indonesian governments for bringing the dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), paving the way for its peaceful settlement.

"Borneo Divers will continue our cooperation as we used to do," he said.

Chairman of the Sabah International Hoteliers Association (SIHA) John Lo said the decision would create more stability in the state's tourism industry as well as increase confidence among visitors to the islands.

"This is good news to the industry as puts to rest all uncertainties," he said.

The ICJ in The Hague, Holland yesterday ruled 16:1 in favour of Malaysia on the issue of sovereignty over the two islands, off Semporna in the Sabah east coast.

-- BERNAMA

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