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MAHATHIR-TOURISM

DR MAHATHIR PROPOSES CODE-SHARING TO PROMOTE MALAYSIA-MOROCCO TOURISM

By: Mohd Arshi Daud/Khaidzir Md Yunus

CASABLANCA, April 18 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir has proposed a code sharing arrangement between the national air carriers of Malaysia and Morocco to boost the movement of tourists into both countries.

"We should think about co-operation between Malaysia Airlines and Royal Air of Morocco," he said at a dialogue session with the Moroccan business community here on Wednesday.

He said since both Malaysia Airlines and Royal Air of Morocco flew into Dubai, having a code sharing agreement would enable them to increase the number of tourists flying from South East Asia and East Asia to Morocco and from Africa to Malaysia.

When asked how can Morocco learn from Malaysia in terms of marketing its tourism industry, Dr Mahathir revealed that Malaysia was able to see a leap in the number of tourist arrivals to 12.8 million last year from just two million in 1990 due to earnest efforts in promoting Malaysia as a tourist destination.

He explained that prior to undertaking its tourism promotion, Malaysia suffered from an image problem where many people could readily identify its neighbours but not Malaysia itself.

"Some people say it is near the Himalayas, some say in Africa because Malawi is there, others say we are in China while some say we are near Singapore. The truth is that Singapore is near Malaysia," he said amidst applause from the floor.

Dr Mahathir said some of the promotional efforts included organising top international sporting events like the Formula 1 Grand Prix and Tour de Langkawi cycling race which were watched by several hundred million people around the world via television.

On possible co-operation in the shipping industries of both countries, he said, "I believe MISC (Malaysian International Shipping Corporation Bhd), which is largely owned by Petronas (the national oil corporation), is talking with a Moroccan company operating out of Bahrain. But there are also other Moroccan shipping lines it (Petronas) can co-operate with."

Later, Dr Mahathir toured the manufacturing plant of Somaca, Moroccan National Car Assembly Plant, followed by a visit to Casablanca's Technopark, Handicraft Centre and Bazaar. -- BERNAMA

MAD/KHY SHY