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Package-Reaction (Tourism)

SPECIAL UNIT TO HELP TOURISM OPERATORS FACING PROBLEMS WITH BANKS

By: Harlina Samson

KUALA LUMPUR, May 21 (Bernama) -- The Culture, Arts and Tourism Ministry will form a special unit to help tour and travel operators restructure their loans with financial institutions in line with the economic stimulus package announced today.

Its minister, Datuk Paduka Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir, said the unit would be formed immediately to ensure banks and financial institutions implement the measures spelt out in the government's strategic economic package.

"I am just concerned ... from past experience, even though a decision had been made by the government, the banks would delay implementing it. I will monitor this myself," he said when contacted for comment on the package unveiled by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today.

The package contains specific steps to help the hospitality and tourism sector, which has been hit hard by global economic uncertainties as well as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak.

He said one of the two most effective steps for the tourism industry was the RM1 billion Special Relief Guarantee Facility (SRGF) provided by Bank Negara to ease operators' cash-flow problems.

Second, he said, tour and travel operators would also benefit when the banking institutions provide the facility to restructure and reschedule their outstanding loans and credit.

However, he said tourism companies and operators needed to first meet their banks to discuss the restructuring.

If there was a problem the operators could then contact the unit so that the ministry could intervene, he said.

On efforts to promote domestic tourism, Abdul Kadir said the people were beginning to show greater interest in local travels, as evident from the "Cuti-Cuti Malaysia" programme.

-- BERNAMA

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