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Dr Mahathir-Langkawi

DR MAHATHIR CONVINCED TOURISM IN LANGKAWI WON'T BE AFFECTED

LANGKAWI, Jan 3 (Bernama) -- Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad is convinced that the tourism sector in Langkawi which was struck by the tidal waves or tsunami last week will not be affected.

"Tourists will continue to come because Langkawi is an attractive island and safe to visit," said the former prime minister who was the architect of the island's development into a leading tourist destination in the region.

"In the near future, tourist arrivals may drop a little because of the shock over the tragedy but when the situation returns to normal, the tourists will come back, he told reporters after visiting the relief centre for victims affected by the tsunami at Sekolah Kebangsaan Kuala Triang and Telaga Harbour Park, here today.

Dr Mahathir said tourists throughout the world were familiar with Langkawi and certainly more were keen to come to the island.

"Everything is functioning as usual in Langkawi, ferry and air services are operating as usual, no hotel is closed, the power and telephone systems are not affected," he said.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, had also expressed his confidence earlier that Langkawi would continue to be a preferred choice of tourists although several villages had been affected by the tidal waves, resulting in the death of a grandmother on the island.

Meanwhile, Dr Mahathir said he came to know about the tsunami via the short messaging service (SMS) while he was in Canada.

He said he was then watching the news on the incident reported by CNN which had said that Phuket in Thailand and Sri Lanka had been devastated by the tsunami.

"I was wondering whether Langkawi or any other part of the country had been hit by the tidal waves. Then at 4 am (Canadian time), someone in Langkawi sent an SMS informing me that the island had also been hit.

"I telephoned to get more information to confirm the news," he told reporters here.

Dr Mahathir said he was thankful when he came to know that the situation in the country was not as bad as in Thailand, Sri Lanka or Indonesia.

"If our country had been badly hit, I would certainly have returned home much earlier," he said, adding that after spending the holidays with his family in Canada, he stopped over in Hong Kong and from there came directly to Langkawi to look at the damage caused by the tsunami.

He said the government had taken swift action to assist the victims.

He also called on the victims to be patient.

"Of course it's uncomfortable staying at the relief centre such as the school during a disaster such as this one. Be patient," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he had contributed in the form of bottled drinking water for the victims in Aceh, which were delivered by a C-130 aircraft yesterday.

He said that in a major disaster such as the one suffered by Aceh, water supply must be made available immediately to the people because the water there would certainly have been contaminated when the tidal waves inundated the area.

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