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ATF-Mahathir

PROMOTE COLOURS OF ASEAN AS TOURISM ATTRACTION, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

LANGKAWI, Jan 26 (Bernama) -- Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called for the Asean countries to be promoted as "the most colourful region in the world".

He encouraged the 10 Asean member countries to fully capitalise on their colourful costumes and diverse ethnic groups and cultures as "there is nothing to lose, only to gain" through the promotional efforts.

"Indonesia has about 200 different ethnic groups, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia...all these countries have something to show, each has different colourful dresses.

"Let us have fashion shows on the dresses in South-East Asia all over the world," he said in his keynote address to kick-start the Asean Tourism Conference (ATC) held in conjunction with the Asean Tourism Forum (ATF) 2005 here today.

Meanwhile, in efforts to ease travel for tourists in the region, Dr Mahathir proposed the establishment of better air link with more low-cost carriers in operation to promote intra-Asean travel among foreign tourists.

He also proposed a single visa for entry to all Asean countries to promote the tourism industry in the region.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful to receive tourists, where we have one visa for South-East Asian countries. Asean countries should consider requiring a single visa for tourists. Let us make it easy to travel from one Asean country to another...we should have simple travel documents," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that at present, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei permit tourists to enter their respective countries without visa for two weeks.

On a lighter note, Dr Mahathir suggested that Asean countries capitalise on their common humid weather as humidity provides natural moisturiser for smooth and youthful skin.

"We can tell tourists from the east and north and far south that if they want to stay young, come to South-East Asia. They can save money on moisturiser. Humidity is an asset to South-East Asia. Let us exploit this as one of the attractions to the region," he said.

Speaking to reporters later, Dr Mahathir said that Malaysia targeted to have one tourist per head of its population, that is 25 million tourists a year in the near future.

Last year, Malaysia boasted about 15 million tourist arrivals into the country, he said.

On the tsunami disaster, Dr Mahathir said that the Asean governments could work together to develop an early warning system to detect similar disasters in the future.

"For example, the Japanese are educated about earthquakes and tsunamis so the people know what to do during the disaster by looking at the warning signs. This never happens here before so our people do not understand what a tsunami is. We are better informed now," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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