



Musa beating the gong to launch the Sandakan Festival 2005 on Sunday night.

Sabah to attract Arab tourists

Ministry to promote State in Middle East, says Musa

By James Leong

SANDAKAN: Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Haji Aman said a delegation from the State Tourism, Culture and Environment Ministry might be sent to Middle East countries to promote Sabah as a tourist destination.

"The first thing is to get the Arab tourists visiting Peninsular to include Sabah as their destination during their stay in the country," Musa said after launching the Sandakan Festival 2005 at Padang Bandaran on Sunday night.

The Chief Minister noted that local tour operators should step up their efforts to attract the growing number of Arab tourists, who are visiting Peninsular, to come to Sabah.

On the travel advisory issued by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs warning its nationals to avoid traveling to coastal areas and dive sites off the east coast of Sabah, Musa said it had no impact as Australians were still visiting the State despite the warning.

Meanwhile, Assistant Tourism, Culture and Environment Minister Datuk Haji Karim Haji Bujang said tourist arrival to the State has recorded positive growth in the past four years.

"For the first five months of this year, the Immigration Department recorded 768,737 tourists visiting the State, an increase of 11.7 percent compared to 687,939 for the corresponding period of last year," Karim said when launching the week-long exhibition at the Sandakan Airport building yesterday.

Karim attributed the encouraging



Karim, accompanied by Lau (second left), visits the Sandakan Harbour Square exhibition booth.

performance to the close collaboration between the government and the private sector in developing the (tourism) sector.

"The Smart Partnership Concept forged by the Government and private sector in the State has sped up the growth of the economy in a planned and effective way with the private sector taking over the role of machinery for growth and the government acting as development facilitator," the minister said.

Karim said the government being the facilitator, would arrange the various support apart from the suitable environment for the private sector, including investors to carry out their activities.

"Sandakan is taking a step ahead with the construction of a five-star hotel which is expected to be completed in 2008. This is the result of the joint venture between the

Sandakan Municipal Council and Syarikat Ireka-Charng Sheng Development Sdn Bhd under the Sandakan Harbour Square project which is a positive indication for the growth of the Sandakan economy," he said.

Karim said upon its completion, the project would increase the accommodation facilities and attract more tourists to the district.

The exhibition is organized by Malaysia Airport Berhad (MAB) Sandakan from June 27 to July 3 in conjunction with Sandakan Festival 2005.

Present at the opening ceremony were deputy municipal council president (II) Thomas Lau who represented municipal council president, MAB general manager Haji Abdul Rahman Karim and representatives from Federal and State Government departments.