

Tuesday October 16, 2007

Checks on all Tioman boats

TANGKAK: All boats and ferries between Mersing and Tioman Island have to be fully inspected by the Marine Department before departure, Johor Mentri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman said.

He said any vessel without licences, safety features or not sea-worthy would be banned.

?It is very sad that such a tragedy had to happen and we are told that the vessel had no valid licence,? he told reporters at his Hari Raya open house in Sungai Mati near here yesterday.

The Tioman Island-bound Seagull Express ferry carrying 103 passengers catching fire off the coast of Mersing on Saturday. Four people drowned after jumping off the ferry, five were injured, and three are still reported missing.

Abdul Ghani said the ferry operator should take full responsibility of the tragedy and urged the police and the Marine Department to act because the state did not want tourism to be affected.

He said the operator had ignored safety measures and deployed the unlicensed vessel to ferry passengers due to the high demand during the Hari Raya holidays.

He added that the department was unaware of the vessel?s departure from Mersing to Tioman and only knew about it after it caught fire, and the vessel was overloaded as it was carrying 103 passengers and they were not given lifejackets.

An angry Tourism Minister Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor called for drastic action against the ferry operator.

?I am shocked and upset. We are promoting Visit Malaysia 2007 and these kind of things happen,? he said in Johor Baru yesterday.

Tengku Adnan said he was even more upset to hear that the ferry crew jumped into the sea to save themselves first.

He said he would discuss this matter and the safety of other boats with the Transport Ministry immediately.

Johor Baru MP Datuk Shahrir Samad called for inspections on all boats to make sure that such tragedies never recurred.

?Why do we always have to wait for a tragedy before we take any action?? he said.

© 1995-2005 Star Publications (Malaysia) Bhd (Co No 10894-D)