

Dr M: We can gain world fame in equestrian sports

JOHOR BARU, Sat. — Malaysia has the potential to become world famous for equestrian sports, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said this was evident from the popularity of the activity and the increasing numbers of Malaysians taking up equestrian activities.

"There is strong public interest in equestrian sports and I am confident more will take it up in future," he said when launching the Johor State Economic Development Corporation's (JSEDC) Fourth Merdeka Equestrian Carnival here.

Dr Mahathir is the patron of the Malaysian Equine Council. Also present were Equestrian Association of Malaysia (EAM) president Datuk Musa Hitam, Menteri Besar Abdul Ghani Othman and JSEDC executive director Datuk Mohamed Ali Hashim.

The four-day carnival, which began yesterday at the City Square, is in conjunction with the JSEDC's 25th anniversary. A total of 140 horses and 90 riders, some from Australia, New Zealand and Singapore, are taking part.

Selection for Malaysia's representatives for the Asean Show Jumping competition in Bogor, Indonesia, and the Sea Games in Chiang Mai this year will be held during the carnival.

Dr Mahathir was glad the event was being held in Johor, adding in jest that this would enable the people of Johor to see live horses in action, instead of the mystical *kuda kepang* as seen in traditional dances.

He also hoped more young people would take up equestrian activities, adding that he was 60 years old when he was introduced to them.

"It is easier to learn when

you are young. At 60, your bones become brittle and you are afraid of injuries. But if young, you are brave and it is easier to learn equestrian skills," he said.

Despite his age, he joked, he was forced to take it up because in Malaysia, if the Prime Minister was not involved, the people did not follow. "So, whether I liked it or not, I had no choice but to join in."

Earlier, Musa said equine activities were now popular with people from all walks of life and not just confined to the rich and famous.

Musa also called on youths and students to take up the activity, which he said was fast growing in popularity.

He noted that Malaysia was getting international recognition in the activity and had participated in events in Hong Kong, Australia and India.