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Racing-Formula

MALAYSIA ENTERS FORMULA ONE RACING ARENA

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LISBON, Sept 19 (Bernama) -- In another effort to propel itself as a dynamic nation, Malaysia has entered the arena of Formula One (F1) motor racing, an area which has been the preserve of the elite among countries.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is scheduled to arrive here tomorrow to help boost Malaysia's bid which was started by Petronas last year when it began to sponsor the Swiss F1 Sauber Team.

Plans are afoot for Malaysia Airports Berhad to build a Formula One racing circuit near the new Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) in Sepang. If all goes well, Malaysia may be on the world F1 map by year 2000.

Also aiming to be on the F1 map in Asia are Indonesia and China. So far, only Japan is in the circuit in East Asia.

Petronas said in a statement it entered Formula One racing to enhance its global presence and to keep up with technological developments in fields related to its core business.

Being the pinnacle in motorsports, F1 receives consistent worldwide television and print coverage, providing an effective avenue for Petronas to promote its and Malaysia's image.

The event receives all round coverage every year with each of the 16 races attracting a more than 350 million strong television audience in 120 countries.

Last year, Petronas received an estimated total "live" TV coverage of 36 minutes from eight races, making F1 sponsorship an effective alternative to direct advertisement.

To optimise the benefits from its involvement in F1, Petronas has formed a joint venture company, Sauber-Petronas Engineering AG, to enhance its technology base. Petronas holds 40 per cent of the equity with the balance owned by Red Bull Sauber Holding, an Austrian-Swiss venture.

Petronas has also entered into a five-year contract to sponsor the Sauber Team.

The sponsorship allows the display of the Petronas name and logo on both sides of the Sauber C15 car, powered by the Ford Zetec-R V 10 engine, as well as on its rear wing.

The words Petronas and Malaysia appear on the side, front and back of the car and are also displayed on the uniforms of the driver and crew.

The Red Bull Sauber Team will see action this Sunday at the Estoril Circuit just outside Lisbon. Dr Mahathir will be in the grandstand to watch the race.

After 14 rounds, the Sauber Team is placed seventh with 10 points.

Sauber drivers, Heinz-Harald Frentzen of Germany and Johny Herbert of Britain, are placed 10th and 14th respectively. The top three drivers are Damon Hill of Britain, Jacques Villeneuve of Canada and Michael Schumacher of Germany.

Herbert won third place at the Monaco GP on May 19, giving Sauber a podium finish for the current race calendar year.

Other than Monaco, Estoril is probably the best resort-oriented F1 Grand Prix venue.

The Autodromo Fernanda Pires Da Silva circuit is only a short distance from the beach.

Completed in 1972, the track has a length of 4.36km and features one of the fastest corners in GP racing. -- BERNAMA

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