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Mahathir-Arrival

PM ARRIVES IN PORTUGAL FOR WORKING VISIT

By: Syed Jamil Jaafar

LISBON, Sept 20 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad arrived here today for a three-day working visit to enhance bilateral relations with Portugal and help push Malaysia's entry into the exciting world of Formula One car racing.

Dr Mahathir is scheduled to call on Portuguese President Dr Jorge Sampaio this evening and have talks with his counterpart Antonio Guterres on Sunday.

Malaysian officials said the two high-level meetings are expected to focus on increasing economic and trade relations.

Malaysia, which is hoping to join the world Formula One racing circuit with the building of a track near the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang, is keen to learn from Portugal's experience in this field.

The Estoril racing track outside Lisbon, built in 1972, is one of 16 which make up the current world circuit.

Japan is the only Asian country to host Formula One racing at present. The Japan GP next month is the last event in this year's racing calendar while the Estoril Grande Premio de Portugal this weekend is the second last.

Dr Mahathir will visit the Estoril track tomorrow and join an expected crowd of some 100,000 to watch the grand prix on Sunday.

Petronas is sponsoring the Red Bull Sauber Team which will see action on Sunday. The Red Bull Sauber Ford Zetec-R V10 car will display the Petronas name and the word "Malaysia".

Taking part in the grand prix are the world's top drivers -- Damon Hill, who is leading in the standings, Jacques Villeneuve, Michael Schumacher, Jean Alesi and Mika Hakinnen.

Red Bull Sauber drivers, Heinz-Harald Frentzen and Johnny Herbert, are in 11th and 14th positions respectively.

Meanwhile, racing circles here said Malaysia has a good chance of being chosen to join the world F1 circuit.

Apart from building a track which meets international specifications, Malaysia has to put forward an attractive enough financial package to bring in the participants, said an official.

"Malaysia also has to provide good infrastructure at the venue, such as enough hotel rooms, but this should not be a problem to Kuala Lumpur," the official said.

Indonesia and China are also aiming to host Formula One racing.

All but five of the 16 Formula One GPs at present are held in Europe. The five held outside Europe are in Australia, Brazil, Argentina, Canada and Japan.

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