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Cycling-De Langkawi

LE TOUR de LANGKAWI PEDALS OFF TOMORROW

KOTA KINABALU, Feb 18 (Bernama) -- After months of preparation, the 1997 Le Tour de Langkawi gets underway tomorrow with a promise to place the country on the world cycling map.

The race that has attracted a world-class field and more countries than any event of its kind outside the World Championship and Olympic Games is a Malaysian national event supported by the government and financially backed by the private sector.

The concept of an international cycling tour around Malaysia was the brainchild of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is the patron of the race.

Modelled after the Tour de France, the world's most prestigious cycling event, the Tour de Langkawi offers a RM1 million prize money for the winners, the biggest in Asia and among the top three in the world.

Dr Mahathir today officially launched the event that has 12 stages covering 1,628km.

The tour starts with a circuit race here before proceeding to Kuching, Batu Pahat/Melaka, Port Dickson/Sunway Lagoon, Kuala Lumpur, Bukit Kiara/Genting Highlands, Bentong/Kuantan, Kuantan/Kuala Terengganu, Kuala Terengganu/Kota Baharu, Jeli/Grik, Kangar/Pulau Pinang and Langkawi Island.

A total of 150 cyclists from 25 teams will sweat it out over 12 days until March 2 to claim the top spot.

The teams include Malaysia, Giant-AIS of Australia, Casino of France, Mapei-GB and MG Technogym of Italy, Cedico and Tegel Toko of Belgium, Post Swiss of Switzerland, Saturn of United States and Schauff Oschelbronn of Germany.

The others are Tuul Tunturi of Finland, Canada, China, Denmark, Britain, Indonesia, Ireland, Japan, Kazakhstan, New Zealand, Norway, the Philippines, Slovakia, South Africa and South Korea.

Malaysia is fielding M. Kumaresan, Nor Effandi Rosli, Seong Hoong Tsen, Muhamad Suhaimi Keton, Azizan Manaf and Faizal Izuan Abd Malik as an elite team.

The tour director of operations Izmee Anwar Datuk Ismail said everything is in place for the start of the event.

"I have checked all the routes especially in Kota Kinabalu that will be used in the stage one event. I am satisfied with all the facilities provided," he said. -- BERNAMA

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