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Race carnival a good way to celebrate: PM

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THE 300km Merdeka Day Race carnival is a good way of celebrating Merdeka Day, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

"I think it is a very good way to celebrate Merdeka Day because to a large extent it is evidence of the success and progress Malaysia has achieved since its independence 40 years ago," he said after flagging off the racers at the Shah Alam Batu Tiga race circuit yesterday.

The event, organised by SAMP Sdn Bhd, is the most exclusive motorsports event featuring the national car.

He added that much has changed from the past, when no one would have dreamt of a race involving "our own Malaysian made cars".

"Today if you look, they sound like Formula One (racing cars). Even if they are not Formula One, they sure sound like it," he said, in reply to reporters questions on what he thinks of the race.

On international talk about Proton going into Formula One racing and car rallies, he said: "No, I don't think it is just Proton. A number of people are interested and they are working together.

"Proton and others including Petronas as well are working together for us to learn about and get technology regarding racing cars and racing engines," he said.

On whether he saw a growing interest outside Malaysia on Proton cars, Dr Mahathir said, "There is a lot of interest, but we have to produce them at a reasonable price. Then I am sure we will be able to compete in the international market," he said.

"Proton is doing its best to bring the cost down and I am sure not long more, our competitiveness will be there. At the same time we will maintain and even improve its quality. The quality of our cars is the same as others, but we must make sure we maintain it.

"Right now we are not competitive in terms of price. We are competing with the Koreans for example, they are somehow or other cheaper than us," he said.

On what will become of the Batu Tiga circuit once the Formula One circuit in Sepang is ready in 1999, Dr Mahathir said the state government will repossess the land.

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