

12/08/1997

Sepang circuit focus of F-1 attention

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CLOSE to a billion spectators will focus their attention on Malaysia when the Sepang circuit hosts a leg of the World Formula One Championship in March 1999.

Theoretically, this will be the most gruelling test of the local organisational skills after next year's Commonwealth Games, and something Malaysia Airports Berhad, the circuit operator, will have to keep up for the next five years after recently sealing the contract to host motor-racing's most prestigious championship.

"With all the eyes on Malaysia, it will be important that we do a good job of hosting the event," said Mokhzani Mahathir, one of Malaysia's leading motorsport personality.

"And the challenge is to do it well every year for the next five years."

He was fairly confident the championship would attract local spectators, so long as there were sufficient promotion and marketing.

With Malaysia being the only host in Southeast Asia, the country is also expected to draw in motor-racing fans from nearby Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, Thailand and as far as Hong Kong.

Mokhzani said the ability to organise an event which was testing on both logistical and technical capabilities, would reflect handsomely on the country should it go well.

"I'm quite confident we will get the fans to come and watch."

Sources have said professionals who helped with the Adelaide Grand Prix in Australia, would be commissioned to work alongside local officials with the Malaysian Grand Prix.

MAB's preparations include sending its officials to this year's championship, with the objective of learning how to organise such an event which was both financially, technically and logistically demanding.

Formula One, however, does have an upside, like what the people of Melbourne had experienced - raking in profits exceeding RM200 million generated from a weekend's affair.

Despite the Hungarian Grand Prix promoter reportedly losing money, more than 180,000 fans had turned up to watch the event every year since 1995, of whom nearly 70,000 were foreigners.

MAB, who intends to run the Grand Prix themselves despite existing commitments, has already formed a team to prepare themselves for grand prix realities.

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