

29/04/1997

Sponsor sailing boat races, urges Dr M

Kamarul Yunus

THE private sector has been urged to sponsor sailing boat races to inspire more Malaysians to participate in the sports and benefiting from getting a wider coverage for their products.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysian companies can gain from sponsoring sailing boat races such as the Malaysia Challenge in Langkawi because this would enable them to advertise their products prominently.

"They can show their logo on the big sail of the boat by being the presenters or sponsors of the sailing boat events," he said at the launching of the Malaysia Challenge '97 in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

The Malaysia Challenge, an international match sailing Grand Prix, will be held in Langkawi scheduled from December 2-7, in conjunction with the fourth Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition (Lima '97).

Contrary to the previous Lima shows, this year's event will see Huswah Exhibition Sdn Bhd manning the maritime section of the exhibition, while Le Proton Lima Sdn Bhd on the aerospace.

On the Malaysia Challenge, Dr Mahathir said this will help promote Malaysia, especially Langkawi as the international focus for sports events.

"Langkawi has been very known in staging events for various international sports, including Lima.

"We have been inaugurating a number of races and all of the events seem very successful.

"I sometimes wonder why we keep on hosting events when during the competition, we usually came in last.

"I hope in this Malaysia Challenge, the Malaysian team will get a nearer placing to the winners," he said, adding that the Malaysia Challenge is also a world class sailing race.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysians have always excused themselves for having their light-built figure that is a barrier for them to run in athletics or in weightlifting event.

"This sailing event does not rely on physical strength and body-built but more on skills and brain.

"So, if Malaysians still lose in this event, they are considered as having no brain," he said in a lighter vein.

However, he said there are some young Malaysian children who had become champion in the sailing events in Asia but stressed that Malaysians have yet to do well in the world championship.

"With the participation from the private sector, we hope to inspire and produce more Malaysian champions in this event," he said, while praising Business Focus Group for its contribution in the event.

Business Focus signed a presenter sponsor agreement with Huswah Exhibition after the launching of the Malaysia Challenge.

Its executive chairman Datuk Amin Shah Omar Shah signed the agreement, while Huswah Exhibition was represented by its executive chairman Vice Admiral (Rtd) Tan Sri Abdul Wahab Nawawi.

"As a presenter sponsor for this event, this would cost Business Focus some US\$1 million," Dr Mahathir said.

Abdul Wahab said a prize of US\$100,000 (US\$1 = RM2.51) and a Malaysian-designed trophy valued at RM20,000 awaits the winning team of the

championship.

"There will be 10 teams participating in the race.

They will race in the preliminary round robin to determine the top four teams for the semi-final and then the final," he said, adding the course for the five-day event is about 1.6km long and each race is between two teams.

In the Malaysia Challenge, he said, the Bruce Farr designed 25-foot boat, which was built in New Zealand, will be used during the event.

The event will also see several top names in international boat racing championship such as Russel Coutts and Chris Dickson of New Zealand; Dennis Connor, the American skipper who led the winning team at the 1995 America's Cup; Paul Cayard of the US; Marc Bouet of France; and Jesper Bank of Denmark, the 1992 Olympic Gold Medalist.

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