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Dr M confident of bigger event next year

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, expressing satisfaction that the Le Tour De Langkawi had managed to carve a niche in the world sports scene, said yesterday he was confident the annual race would improve and attract more prominent world-class riders.

"Yes, I expect more participants next year and I expect it to be a bigger event," he said after presenting trophies and prizes to the winners at Dataran Merdeka.

Dr Mahathir said the decision to end the race in the Federal Capital was a good choice because more people could attend and cheer the teams.

"I am quite sure this is very encouraging both for the cyclists and organisers and the teams that came here," he said.

Asked on future plans for the race, Dr Mahathir, who was given the title of "Father of Le Tour de Langkawi" - now the third richest race in the world - said: "Well, when I suggested the race I thought it was going to be around Langkawi.

"It was a small race going up the hill but I never expected it to be a race that goes around the country and become one of the world's major events in the cycling calendar."

He said the race had stirred a lot of interest and those who had participated commented that it was well organised and were satisfied that it was a real endurance test for them.

Dr Mahathir said he was sure in future there would be more participation by other teams, not so much just to win but exhibiting the spirit of sportsmanship.

He hoped the organisers would continue to make plans to enhance the race since it had emerged as a world class event.

"Initially, we planned it as a small race covering only Langkawi but there are those who feel that we should organise it like the Tour de France," he said.

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