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Mahathir-Le Tour

PRIME MINISTER CONFIDENT LE TOUR DE LANGKAWI WILL IMPROVE

KUALA LUMPUR, March 1 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is confident that the annual cycling race, Le Tour de Langkawi 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 told newsmen after presenting trophies and prizes to winners of the race which ended here today.

He said the decision to end the race in the Federal Capital was a very good one because the organisers found that a lot more people would be attending and cheering 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 of future plans for the race, Dr Mahathir who was given the title of "Father of Le Tour de Langkawi" 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 throughout the country and becomes one of the world major events in the cycling race calendar for the year."

He said the race had attracted a lot of interests and those who had participated commented that it was very well organised and they were satisfied that it was a real endurance 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 standard 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.

He said the response from international riders, individually and as a team, this time was very encouraging. "So, I am confident the event will be greater in future."

Asked whether the prize-money would be increased in future, he said for that the organisers needed more sponsors.

"The race received wide publicity and seen by more than 300 million TV viewers all over the world. So did the sponsors' name and logo and I hoped more sponsors would come forward in future and then we could provide more lucrative prizes," he said.

While congratulating the winners, Dr Mahathir hoped that all participants would go home with pleasant memories of what a beautiful and friendly country Malaysia is. --BERNAMA

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