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Tour hosts short of RM3m

Jugjet Singh

THREE million ringgit in one week. That is how much the organisers of the Le Tour de Langkawi will have to source for if they don't want to end up losers like last year.

"We have a pool of about 10 other sponsors who will contribute in cash and kind but we are still short of RM3 million to organise the Tour which begins on Feb 18," said First Cartel executive chairman Wan Lokman Wan Ibrahim in Shah Alam yesterday.

"This year we did not receive anything from the government. Our main sponsors are Telekom who handed in RM6 million and Petronas who gave RM2.5 million."

The third richest bicycle race in the world, with RM1.6 million in prize money on offer, is the brainchild of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who wanted larger local participation at international sports meets.

First Cartel, the organisers of the Tour, are still paying for a loan they took to organise the race last year. And this year, they are finding it hard to approach potential sponsors.

Petronas have come in strongly to help the third edition of the Tour as they will also sponsor RM400,000 worth of fuel vouchers.

Yesterday, DRB-Hicom handed in 106 cars to be used for the Tour while Sukom Ninety Eight Berhad pledged to provide souvenir bags.

The DRB-Hicom sponsored cars will later be handed over to Sukom to be utilised for the Commonwealth Games.

"Sukom will use the Tour to promote the Commonwealth Games.

"We will go big on advertising and also set up booths along the route to sell Commonwealth Games souvenirs and hand out pamphlets," said Sukom Chief Executive Officer Lt Gen (R) Datuk Manap Ibrahim.

Fifteen Sukom-trained volunteers will also assist in running the Tour in order to get first-hand experience.

Malaysia will be represented by Time Telekom-Malaysia and Malaysia B in the 1,820km Tour which is given 2.5 classification by the International Cycling Union (UCI).

Time Telekom-Malaysia will be made up of veterans M. Kumaresan, Tsen Seong Hoong, Shahrulneeza Razali, Nor Affendy Rosli who will be joined by Syed Hussaini Mazlan and Mahadzir Hamad.

Malaysia B will be represented by Hardi Razali, Musairi Musa, Wong Ah Thiam, Lee Robert, Chung Chee Wai and Faizul Izuan Rahman.

Japan, who are not fielding a team, and South Korea's absence have boosted Malaysia's chances of winning the Orange Jersey.

The teams that will be in Malaysia's way for the overall Asian leader's Orange Jersey are China, Indonesia and the Philippines.

The Russians represented by Lada-CSKA-Samara, who will be making their debut in the Tour, were the first team to arrive on Jan 21 and headed straight for Cameron Highlands to get acclimatised. The other teams will arrive soon.

Last year, Italy-MG Tech's Luca Scinto won his second Tour when he beat Australia's Henk Vogels by two minutes and 24 seconds at the end of the 60.5km around the Island final stage.

The Orange Jersey was won by Sergei Lavrenenko from Kazakhstan.

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