

# PRACTICAL DREAMERS

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## PM: Malaysians work hard to realise vision

By P. BALA KUMAR

**SEPANG:** Malaysians are practical dreamers who work hard to realise their vision and projects, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said last night.

Opening the RM286mil state-of-the-art Sepang F1 Circuit here, the Prime Minister singled out the racing facility as one of the projects that Malaysia had built which brought the country international recognition and which all Malaysians could be proud of.

"Malaysians are practical dreamers. They dreamt of holding a Formula One race in Malaysia. They did not go on sleeping and dreaming.

"With their usual pragmatism, they planned and built this circuit even as they negotiated to bring the Formula One race here.

"As a crony, the Prime Minister was co-opted to persuade the redoubtable Bernie Ecclestone (the Formula One Administration Ltd chairman) to include Malaysia in the Formula One racing calendar," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the facility would bring tremendous benefit to the country although it was done at a time when the country was facing economic slowdown.

He said if the people who questioned the rationale behind the building of the racing facility knew the benefits that came with the Formula One race, they would realise that it provided a fantastic opportunity.

"In the first place, the circuit will complement the extensive development of this area (Sepang).

"We have the new Kuala Lumpur Interna-

tional Airport, Cyberjaya, Putrajaya and the Multimedia Super Corridor, all in this area which will be a gateway to our country and the region.

"In fact, the Sepang F1 Circuit can even become a centre for motor sports development not only for the country but also for the region. It is cheaper for foreign teams to base themselves here," he said.

The Prime Minister also said the Sepang F-1 Circuit, formerly known as the Sepang International Circuit, was the first in the world to be allowed to incorporate the F1 logo in its name.

"This is a great honour for this circuit," Dr Mahathir said.

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# Circuit to complement automotive industry

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The circuit, with a 30,000 spectator capacity, will host the World 500cc Grad Prix Motorcycle Championship on April 17 and the F1 on Oct 18.

Work on the 260ha circuit started in September 1997 and was completed in 15 months.

Also present were the Raja Muda of Selangor, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, Youth and Sports Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Malaysia Airports Bhd chairman Tan Sri Basir Ismail, Formula One team managers and foreign dignitaries.

Dr Mahathir said although the circuit was costly, it would have cost more if it had been planned and built after the depreciation of the ringgit.

He said it was satisfying that Malaysia had built many of the country's projects, including the KLIA, the National Sports Com-

plex and expressways at a time when the ringgit was strong.

"Had we delayed their construction it is likely that we would not have built them at all," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the circuit would complement the rapidly growing automotive industry and the need for research and development in the sector.

He said the benefit that the tourism industry would enjoy and the revenue from advertisements were other factors one had to consider.

"The attention of some two billion people from over 200 countries will be focused on Malaysia in October.

"For a good hour and a half, all eyes will be on our country. If we work out the cost of one minute of advertising on TV and multiply it by 90, we can get some idea of the advertising value this circuit will give us."

The Prime Minister said

the hosting of Formula One racing would again provide the opportunity for Malaysia to show the world that it could organise world-class sports events.

Dr Mahathir later received the F-1 logo for the circuit from world champion Mika Hakkinen. With the wave of a flag, the Prime Minister officially launched the circuit, followed by a fireworks display and a concert by local artistes.

The new circuit received one of the most ringing endorsements yesterday from Hakkinen, who said it was the best and one of the most challenging in the world.

"It is not only the best in the world. It is really very demanding. I like it, it's very good work," he said after testing the circuit yesterday.

Hakkinen also called on Dr Mahathir at his office.

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