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Circuit-Opening

DR MAHATHIR OPENS WORLD-CLASS SEPANG F-1 CIRCUIT

SEPANG, March 9 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad opened the multi-million ringgit Sepang F-1 Circuit here tonight which will be the stage for adrenalin-charged Formula One (F1) racing in October.

Dr Mahathir declared the 5.542km circuit open with the wave of a special flag, marking the culmination of a RM286 million endeavour which took slightly more than a year to build, beginning September 1997.

Present were his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Youth and Sports Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and Tan Sri Basir Ismail, chairman of Malaysia Airports Berhad which owns the track.

Dazzling laser rays and colourful bouquets of fireworks lit up the night sky over the track which was constructed on 260 hectares of former oil palm plantation.

Apart from those who paid RM5 each to witness the ceremony, viewers could also watch it from the comfort of their homes, thanks to a live coverage by RTM.

An exciting programme has been lined up for the launch. It includes a car exhibition, an autograph and photography session with F1 personalities like reigning world champion, Finland's Mika Hakkinen, a march band, stunt bikes as well as car and bikes parade.

Hakkinen, who flew in from Australia last night after taking part in the first F1 race of the season, visited the circuit this morning and tested it in a Mercedes sports car.

At a lunch hosted by Mobil Oil Malaysia Sdn Bhd, he described the circuit as "really world class".

Prior to the F1 race, motorsport enthusiasts will get the chance to savour another fast-paced action at the track with the staging of the World Motorcycle Grand Prix next month.

Equipped with state-of-the-art technology, it is the only race track in the world to provide double frontage grandstand area which can accommodate 30,000 fans.

Another 100,000 fans will be able to watch races from the sprawling natural stands and about 50 to 70 per cent of the actual race can be watched by them without leaving their seats.

-- BERNAMA

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