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Mahathir-Mountain

DR MAHATHIR LAUNCHES 15TH WORLD MOUNTAIN RUNNING TROPHY

KUNDASANG, Sept 18 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today launched the prestigious 15th World Mountain Running Trophy, to be held here tomorrow where the world's best mountain racers are competing.

The prime minister, who arrived in this district this morning on a special helicopter from the state capital Kota Kinabalu, said the race is meaningful to Malaysia not only to promote the country overseas but also to enable visitors to see for themselves the country and its people.

"I must say that the World Mountain Running Association (WMRA) did us a good turn for choosing Malaysia for this event. For that we have prepared the mountain for you," he said at the launching, at the Kinabalu Park multipurpose hall.

Seen from a distance was the majestic Mount Kinabalu, Southeast Asia's highest mountain, glistening in the sun under the clear morning skies of Kundasang.

Speaking casually and in jest, Dr Mahathir related to the participants and the audience how he could not understand mountain climbing for he himself finds it difficult to climb the ladder at his house, a remark which drew laughter from the audience.

In jovial mood, Dr Mahathir also spoke of his "own race" during his long political career since contesting for the first time in 1964 and since then he is being constantly chased by the opposition parties.

"So from the political angle I can understand how tough it is to run up mountains," he said, which also drew laughter.

He said although he had yet to reach the top of the 4,095.2-metre Mount Kinabalu, but if he ever reach there, it would have to be by helicopter.

Wishing the contestants all their best in the race, Dr Mahathir also hope they would enjoy their stay here and will go back to their home country with fond memories of the the state and the country.

"I hope you will go back and tell your friends about the wonderful experience you have here...our objective is to bring in more tourists and of course more tourist money into the country," he said.

The race, held for the first time not only in Malaysia but also in Asia, will be flagged off tomorrow on the hilly course at the vicinity of the Kinabalu Park, here.

It consist of four categories -- the men's section which covers a distance of 12.5km, women (7.8km), junior men (7.8km) and junior women (4.1km).

Malaysia, through the Sabah Tourism Promotion Corporation (STPC), won the bid in 1997 in Czech Republic after trying twice in 1995 and 1996 in Scotland and Austria, respectively.

Some 300 participants from 33 countries will compete in the event.

Meanwhile, WMRA president Danny Hughes paid tribute to Dr Mahathir's presence at the function, saying it was a great honour for the event.

He also thanked the local organisers for making it easier for the contestants to travel from their home country to here which otherwise would cost them quite a dollar especially on the transportation and accommodation.

Hughes later presented the event's first gold medal to the prime minister as a token of appreciation to Dr Mahathir.

Today's ceremony was preceded by the parade-of-the-nation led by last

year's host France and followed by two oath-takings, first the Athlete's Oath by Malaysia's team captain M. Ramachandran who won the gold medals in both the 5,000 metre and 10,000 metre gold events at last month's SEA Games in Brunei Darussalam, and the other the Technical Officials' Oath led by race director Balwant Sing Kler.

Also present were Chief Minister Datuk Osu Sukam, Malaysian Amateur Athletic Union president Datuk Khalid Yunus, Sabah cabinet ministers and officials from STPC, the organiser of the event.

Dr Mahathir later proceed to Mount Kinabalu Golf Resort, some 40km from here, to launch another international event -- the Malaysia invitation hang gliding championship "Kinabalu Challenge '99".

-- BERNAMA

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