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Dr M: F1 race a boost to commerce, tourism (HL)

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THE hosting of motorsports events like the Formula One Grand Prix can attract more commerce and tourists to Malaysia and help strengthen the automotive industry, as well as promote the sport among Malaysians, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says.

It is also a reflection of Malaysia's considerable progress in the automotive industry that the country was successful in its bid to host the F1 Grand Prix race for the first time, the Prime Minister said.

"This is not easy to do. Many countries in Asia and the world want to host the F1. We are thankful that we can host it for the first time, which will be watched by millions of fans in over 200 countries," he said when opening the KL Motorsports Show 99 in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

The event has helped put Malaysia on the world map, and will attract more commerce and tourists to the country, he added.

The spinoffs aside, the organisers, it was reported, have only to sell all of the 92,000 tickets (worth about RM47 million) to break even.

A clearer picture should emerge when Universiti Malaya completes its three-month study to evaluate the economic impact on the country due to the Petronas Malaysian Grand Prix.

Nevertheless, immediate gains are already evident. Hotels in the Subang and Sepang areas are preparing for full occupancy during the race. Some have been fully booked for a while and are using the opportunity to organise F1-related events.

In addition, a group of British motorsports companies, visiting Kuala Lumpur for the first time as part of a business delegation from Mid-Yorkshire, indicated interest to cooperate with Malaysian companies in expanding the country's motorsports infrastructure.

Separately, British company Everyman Driving Centre is reportedly in discussions with Motorsports Solution Sdn Bhd to look into the possibility of running a driving centre in Selangor as public interest in the sport increases.

Indeed, Stewart-Ford grand prix executive chairman Jackie Stewart has pointed out that the RM286 million Sepang International Circuit (SIC) is a good investment and an effective marketing tool for Malaysia.

The F1 race is the most widely telecast sport in the world, with 300 million viewers expected to tune in this Sunday.

The October 14-24 Motorsports Show 99 at the Putra World Trade Centre is held in conjunction with the International F1 race at the Sepang circuit on October 15-17.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysian youths should venture into organised motorsports instead of taking part in illegal midnight races on the streets of Kuala Lumpur or the highways.

"By participating in organised competitions, they can improve their driving skills and maybe one day we will have a Malaysian who can participate in the F1 race," he added.

The Prime Minister said although the F1 is currently the top motorsports, other competitions would be promoted as well.

For example, the recent abolition of taxes and duties on go-karts and related equipment is a step in this direction, he added.

The Government will continue to promote these activities as part of efforts to enhance Malaysia's automotive engineering capabilities and allow the country to design racing cars of international standards, Dr

Mahathir said.

Motorsports are also a healthy recreational activity that can be enjoyed by Malaysians of all ages, he added, noting that the country has come a long way since the time the automotive industry's only activity was to import cars designed and built in other countries.

"Now we have the capacity to design and build our own cars."

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