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Everyone must ensure F1 race at Sepang is a success

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WAN and Syah joined their father to see the Proton 300km Merdeka race at the Sepang F1 Circuit about two weeks ago.

They were quite excited because the newspapers had been hyping up the event, especially with the forthcoming main event in mid-October.

The two boys had seen a similar race before. It was in 1997 and at the Shah Alam circuit. It was quite exciting and the smell of racing fuel and the deafening sound of loud exhausts added to the general atmosphere.

So the two boys were quite happy to join their dad who's not into car racing but a modest car enthusiast nonetheless.

They encountered a small problem when they reached the circuit - parking. Their dad was given a car park sticker marked B. But the car park boys led them to several places before an informed attendant said car stickers marked B are for the paddock area.

It would be a good idea that car park attendants be fully briefed on their duties and given some general information not just about the car park facilities but about the whole event as well.

I can't imagine what first time visitors to our world-class circuit would feel and comment if we can't get our parking attendants to show simple directions.

This may seem a very petty issue to some, but the country's pride could very well be at stake here. Having won acclaim for our excellent staging of the Commonwealth Games last year, the world would expect another brilliant affair this time around. In fact, Malaysians too expect no less.

The F1 race is both a motorsport and business, big business. RM300 million was spent to make the track, and all eyes are watching us, near and far.

When the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil was built for Sukom 98, there were loud voices too but the successful staging of the Games drowned them.

I suppose its the same with our Sepang circuit. If the motor racing fraternity had acknowledged the circuit as truly world class, then this must be backed by excellent service and facilities.

The race itself will be organised by the race experts, which means that we can't be faulted should anything go wrong.

But on our part, we need to put up a grand show to tell the motorsport bosses that we're more than able to provide support services for the world event. In staging a world event, nothing should be left to chance. Part of its continued success would depend on first impressions.

One should take a leaf from Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's management style. The Prime Minister pays meticulous attention to detail, as was demonstrated when the construction of the Petronas Twin Towers was in progress. Dr Mahathir would visit the construction site often to make sure that everything met his exacting standards.

He did the same thing when Malaysia hosted the Apec Summit last year. I'm told he visited Cyberlodge several times to make sure that everything, and that means everything, was in place. Cyberlodge was the venue for the retreat for Apec leaders and the country's CEO wanted to make sure that all expectations were met.

Well before next month's big show, we've won praises for the Sepang circuit. Suzuki's Kenny Roberts (500cc rider) gave the thumbs up, as did world Formula One champion Mika Hakkinen. Impressed, Hakkinen said the circuit "is one of the best in the world." His view is shared by Lord

Astor of Hever, the president of Britain's Motorsports Industries/Association, who visited the circuit in October last year.

Against such high praise, surely much is expected of us, the service provider. As was the case with Sukom '98, everyone of us were behind the Games to make it a success. It was everyone's duty to make a difference with the Games, and we did.

It's no different this time around. We've done it before, and we can do it again. I hope that the people behind the F1 main event are not discouraged by the recent spate of mild controversy surrounding the Proton Merdeka Race.

The people of Proton may justifiably feel a little upset since the event carries their name. But I'm sure that this is all part of our learning curve as we fast-track into the glamorous world of F1 racing.

But what's this I hear of a local top rider who is said to have posed in the nude for a foreign magazine.

Wearing only his vanity and carrying a tyre to help him flex his wiry muscles, the racer claimed that he goes to the gym six times a week as part of his keep-fit regime. That part of it is really good for others to follow, but posing in the raw? Well, that's another matter.

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