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Grand launching of the Sepang F1 circuit

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THOUSANDS of motorsport enthusiasts braved through the heavy downpour to witness the grand launching of the new Sepang F1 circuit recently.

Dazzling laser lights and fireworks display lit up the night sky as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad officially opened the circuit.

The audience, who paid RM5 each to witness the ceremony, gave a big applause as the reigning world champion Finland's Mika Hakkinen and Team Ferrari driver Eddie Irvine appeared on stage at the double-frontage grandstand to greet them.

Irvine won the season's opening race in Melbourne in early March.

The programme which followed were a marching band, stuntbike performance, car and bike parades, as well as performances by local artistes.

Earlier in the day, Hakkinen and Irvine who drove around the track for the first time in their fast cars were impressed with it.

An exhibition of sports cars also became a crowd puller at the circuit.

Besides the double frontage grandstand which can house 30,000 spectators, there are four other stands around the circuit which can accommodate 100,000 spectators and two helipads. The circuit has over 18,000 parking bays.

Motorsport fans will have the opportunity to savour the fast-paced action at the RM286 million track which will be used as the penultimate venue for the season's championship in October.

Also present at the opening were the Prime Minister's wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, the Regent of Selangor Tengku Idris, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik and wife Datin Seri Ena Ling and Tan Sri Basir Ismail who is chairman of Malaysia Airports Berhad.

Basir is also the owner of the track which was constructed on a 260ha former oil palm plantation.

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