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Motor racing-Hakkinen

IT WILL BE TOUGH IN OCTOBER, SAYS HAKKINEN

SEPANG, March 9 (Bernama) -- Reigning world champion Mika Hakkinen of Finland predicted that the first-ever Malaysian Formula One Grand Prix for the world championship series at the newly-built Sepang FI Circuit in October will be a demanding one.

The West McLaren Mercedes driver said the hot and humid condition would be the biggest problem for the drivers with the championship at its penultimate stage.

"It's going to be very interesting to compete here on the new circuit. But the biggest problem is with the heat," he told reporters at a special meet-the-press session at the Sepang FI Circuit here today.

Hakkinen, known as "The Flying Finn" in the motor-racing fraternity, said however, he had enough experience competing in such conditions and was ready to meet the challenge.

"In the 1991-92 season I competed in hot and humid Mexico as well as another experience in South Africa in 1991. So, I know already what it looks like," said the 30-year-old driver.

Malaysia will be staging its first ever leg in the FIA Formula One World Championship on Oct 17, the second last leg of the 16-leg championship and the second Asian country after Japan to host it.

Hakkinen is here to attend the opening of the newly-built Sepang F1 Circuit tonight by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

After testing the new circuit in a Mercedes SLK 230 for about four laps, the Finn commented that he liked the circuit very much because it has a lot of corners and described it as demanding.

"Definitely, I like to have my team to study the circuit before taking part. You have to learn every aspect of the track but above all, it will be very exciting to come here in October," he said.

In the season-opening Australian Formula One Grand Prix in Melbourne on Sunday, Hakkinen failed to materialise as he had to retire after completing 21 laps due to a mechanical problem.

-- BERNAMA

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