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Let's help make Alex's F1 dream come true

Mohd Idris Hassan

THE XVI Commonwealth Games which we hosted last year showed how government backing and our Prime Minister's personal interest can contribute towards making an event of this magnitude a resounding success.

It is, thus, good news that the Government, through the Youth and Sports Ministry, has decided to endorse Alex Yoong's bid to race in Formula One despite his professional status.

It takes millions of ringgit to train a Formula One aspirant before he moves into the mainstream of Formula One races.

Despite the tremendous potential shown by Alex and the herculean effort of his father Hanifa Yoong, his family and friends to raise funds, the Formula One scene is just too colossal in terms of finance for individuals to indulge in successfully.

The Sepang F1 circuit is the brainchild of our motorsport-loving Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who once said:

"If you have the will and do something with full commitment, you are bound to succeed."

Alex has proven, with his steady progress in Formula Three, that he has the determination, courage and commitment to become a successful Formula One driver.

It will be a tribute to Malaysia and motor sports to have a local lad at the starting grid come 2001.

It is not good enough to have a state-of-the-art Formula One circuit and the best organisation, without at some stage having a Malaysian driver who can pit his skills against the best in the world in the spirit of Malaysia Boleh.

To this effect, the Prime Minister was quoted as saying: "I take pride in the achievements of anyone as long as he is a Malaysian. I want Malaysians to be brave and try new things."

Top-notch drivers are synonymous with their country of origin.

Mika Hakkinen of Finland, Michael Schumacher of Germany and Damon Hill of Britain, to name a few, have brought much pride and fame to their motherland. They are their countries' best "ambassadors".

For Alex, it may take a while before he can even think of a podium finish, but he will definitely not be one of the back markers or one who will be there to make up the numbers.

Alex has over the years developed himself into a human dynamo with almost insatiable energy. He will do Malaysia proud.

I first met Alex in 1988 when his father brought his racing-crazy son around to the Batu Tiga circuit in Shah Alam, to watch the latter prepare his cars.

The senior Yoong was himself an accomplished saloon car driver who has devoted a lifetime to motor sports.

It was in this atmosphere of tyres burning the track and the smell of petrol fumes that young Alex went on to hone his skills in go-kart and moto-cross.

Some years later when I met him again, the much matured 15-year-old was already in the thick of motor racing, often brushing aside more experienced and senior drivers of his time.

A podium finish was almost always a routine with Alex. He made this fast and dangerous sport look so easy.

The efforts of Youth and Sports Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin to

source funds from the private sector to assist Alex towards making him a Formula One racer is laudable and timely.

Perhaps, we could set up a "Yoong Towards Formula One" fund where private organisations, clubs and individuals can contribute towards a dream come true.

Let's help put a Malaysian in the fastest show on earth.