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PM pays tribute to special breed

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday paid tribute to the special breed of cyclists and acknowledged that Le Tour de Langkawi which has grown bigger than expected since its inception four years ago has helped boost tourism in Malaysia.

The 12-day event, which flags off from Langkawi today, has attracted 150 riders from 24 teams and Dr Mahathir described them as a tough breed "who eat and breathe cycling".

"In fact, they even take their cycles to bed. Anyway it is better than taking other people to bed," he said in jest when he launched the Tour in a colourful ceremony at the Berjaya Beach and Spa Resort in Langkawi yesterday.

Dr Mahathir is the patron of the Tour.

On the tourism aspect, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia, is now better known as a tourist destination because of events like the Tour even though the country is sandwiched between Thailand and Indonesia who are more popular tourist destinations.

"Earlier we had planned Le Tour de Langkawi as a small race to popularise the island resort but right from the first event in 1996, it has become a big international event attracting cyclists from various parts of the world."

Now the fourth edition which flags off today, he said, is expected to be seen by some 1.2 billion television viewers.

Besides promoting tourism, the cycling industry had also been given a boost, he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was now producing sophisticated machines like mountain bicycles although it had not ventured into racing machines.

The event is organised First Cartel Sdn Bhd.

Dr Mahathir also thanked sponsors including permanent sponsors Telekom Malaysia, Petronas, Malaysian Tourism Development Board, Gamuda, Proton, Malaysia Airlines, Genting, Plus, Nestle, Perodua, KRU and Sony for their support.

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