

18/10/1999

PM pleased by high praise from FIA and racers

Zakri Baharudin

SEPANG, Sun. - Visibly satisfied with the smooth running of the inaugural Petronas Malaysian Grand Prix here, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was even more pleased when Formula One proponents described the circuit as a benchmark for similar races elsewhere.

The Prime Minister said the congratulations received, including those from the International Automobile Federation (FIA), should encourage the circuit organisers to do even better in the coming years.

Speaking to newsmen just before leaving the circuit, Dr Mahathir said: "I've been told that this circuit now sets a new standard for the whole world and this means the other Grand Prix hosts must make more investments in upgrading their existing circuits.

"Everyone was very satisfied and pleased with the way the Grand Prix was organised.

"Even officials from the FIA gave their congratulations as I was about to present the winners their prizes. They told me this is the best race ever."

Dr Mahathir, wearing the official Sepang F1 Circuit uniform, watched the race from the stands and had earlier visited all the teams and met the drivers.

He said Malaysians would also benefit from the race as there would be a lot of spin-offs in view of the worldwide publicity.

The spin-offs would benefit all and boost tourism, besides helping to create more jobs, he said.

In terms of worldwide recognition, Dr Mahathir said: "Before, Malaysia was not as well known. We used to get people asking where exactly Malaysia is when we travel overseas and most of us would feel disappointed when we hear this.

"But now after the F1, the world would know where Malaysia is and what type of country this is and they would be very impressed."

Dr Mahathir said Eddie Jordan, manager and owner of the Jordan-Mugen Honda Racing Team, even asked him why he (Jordan) hadn't heard any good things about Malaysia before this as everything had been excellent throughout his visit.

"Jordan even agreed that there should be more responsible reporting on Malaysia in future."

The Prime Minister also congratulated Malaysia Airports Berhad chairman Tan Sri Basir Ismail and those responsible for putting together Malaysia's inaugural Formula One race.

He also commended the 800 personnel who were on duty to make sure that the race weekend went ahead smoothly.

"I hope that this success will enable them to better plan and organise future races on this circuit," he said.

"Malaysians would also be enlightened by this event and have a broader perspective of what goes on around the world.

"Even I didn't dream of seeing a F1 race in Malaysia, what more getting praises from people like (Michael) Schumacher, (Mika) Hakkinen and (Eddie) Jordan, and the team managers.

"They all said we have set the benchmark for F1 races in the new millennium."

Dr Mahathir also paid tribute to the high standard of discipline shown by Formula One racers, saying that this should serve as an example to

Malaysian athletes.

"I see that racing people like Schumacher and Hakkinen are very well disciplined. In view of this, they can win. I'm told that they don't drink (liquor) before a race, they sleep early, they look after their health, don't overeat... that's how disciplined they are."

Comparing these professionals to some local sportsmen, Dr Mahathir said Malaysian sports personalities tend to lose their discipline even after small victories. Some even blame their coaches for not doing well, he said.

The Prime Minister said an indisciplined community was unlikely to attain success and advised young children, particularly those who are still studying, to realise the importance of discipline.

"The Government can do everything, build this track, put up other projects but if there is no discipline, sorry lah."

Dr Mahathir said that after the F1 race, the Sepang circuit would be upgraded and used for other motorsports such as go-kart and 4x4 races as it was not built just for the F1.

(END)