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PM: Interest in motorsports growing

SEPANG, Sun. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today more companies will be interested in promoting motorsports as its popularity among Malaysians is increasing.

"There are not many now but I am quite confident that as it becomes more popular, lots of people and sponsors will want to be involved in activities related to racing."

The Prime Minister noted that the interest was picking up but felt its development should proceed gradually.

For a start, Dr Mahathir said duties on go-karts would be abolished, expressing the hope that this would generate further interest in the sport.

"We hope to produce real class F1 drivers in time but perhaps Malaysians should start with go-karts before moving on to others. In fact, many F1 drivers started with go-karts," he said after flagging off the Proton International Merdeka Race at the Sepang F1 Circuit.

On whether more ought to be done to popularise racing including building more circuits and having weekly races, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't know whether races can be held every week but I am quite sure that we will begin with races in three, two, one month and so on. Things should progress gradually."

On the benefits of staging the F1 race, Dr Mahathir reiterated that the advantages, especially to tourism, were considerable.

"I was told that most of the 30,000 seats available here have been booked by foreigners. In fact, they have taken the expensive seats ... this means lots of revenue for the Government and other services."

He said F1 race was an event followed by 300 million people all over the world and broadcast to 52 countries.

"The broadcast time is long. If one is to work out the cost needed to project Malaysia to 300 million people over that period of time, we would have some idea on the value of the event."

The Prime Minister was also asked on the development in the design and production of a locally-made engine by Proton.

He said this vision could be realised in about two years as Proton, which he described as being the most progressive new automotive manufacturing company in both the developed and developing countries, was working on the project.

"We now have the capacity to design and produce an engine suitable for our cars."

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