

18/10/1999

F1 Grand Prix will benefit all, says PM (HL)

Lokman Mansor

THE hosting of the Formula One race will generate immense spillover benefits - from the tourism and domestic automotive industries right down to the rural population, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He said the Petronas Malaysian Grand Prix, the first to be hosted by Malaysia, has put the country on the world map, and participants and spectators who came to the race were impressed with what they saw.

"This kind of exposure means more than millions of ringgit worth of advertising," Dr Mahathir told reporters at the end of the international motorsports event at the Sepang International Circuit (SIC) yesterday.

He was asked to comment on scepticisms that hosting the F1 race will only benefit urban people and not all Malaysians, especially those in rural areas.

"The several hours we had before the race introduced them (foreigners) to Malaysia, and with that their interest to visit the country has increased. If we can attract more tourists to Malaysia, then surely there will be benefits," Dr Mahathir added.

He said more tourists means more employment opportunities for Malaysians, and the revenue and investment gains to the Government can be used to finance development projects.

"So we cannot say there is nothing for the rural folk. These are all spinoffs. Not directly, perhaps, because rural folk may not come to see the race. Even then, I believe there may be some who came to see the race," Dr Mahathir said.

He said hosting the F1 race is also one way of expanding the view of Malaysians to realise that there is a wider world out.

"Actually, I myself never dreamed of watching a race of international standard in Malaysia, what more for them to praise and be impressed with Malaysia," Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister said everyone he met - F1 drivers, managers, and officials - all said the SIC was the best course and set the benchmark for future F1 courses.

He also congratulated and thanked the organisers and staff who worked hard to ensure the smooth running of the event.

"I hope this experience will enable them to plan and organise races just as well later," he added.

Dr Mahathir said in between hosting the F1 race every year, other types of races can be organised at the SIC, which also has a go-kart circuit and four-wheel-drive track.

"Many F1 drivers started out with go-karts, so this is where our young kids can learn how to drive. Some of them should focus on motorsports in an organised way, not racing (illegally) in the middle of the night," Dr Mahathir said.

He said Malaysians who want to excel in sports should discipline themselves like champion drivers Michael Schumacher and Mika Hakkinen.

"Before a race they do not drink, they sleep early, look after their health and do not overeat. We see how disciplined they are; that is why they can win. In our case, after a small victory, we start to lose our discipline. We don't like training and complain about our coaches," Dr Mahathir said.

He said Malaysians must learn this because a nation whose people are not

disciplined cannot expect to become successful.

"We hope our youth understand the importance of discipline. The Government can prepare the infrastructure, build race tracks and all, but if we don't have discipline, sorry," Dr Mahathir added.

(END)