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Yoong for Petronas-Sauber?

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SPORT Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin yesterday expressed hope that Petronas would help Alexander Yoong who is trying to get into Formula One racing.

He said Petronas have the resources to help Yoong become Malaysia's first Formula One driver. The Government, he said, would ask the national oil giant to rope him into the Red Bull Sauber Petronas team.

"It will take about RM14 million to help Yoong take part in championships and prepare for his target," said Muhyiddin.

"It's a big sum for a sponsorship. From what I see, the only company capable of this is Petronas."

Muhyiddin said he spoke to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on the matter about three weeks ago.

He said as there was a possibility of a revamp in the Red Bull Sauber Petronas' list of drivers, Petronas, who are one of the team's sponsors, could consider giving Yoong a breakthrough into Formula One.

"Maybe the time is not right now but in two years, Yoong should be ready," he said.

Yoong who aspires to be a Formula One driver by the year 2001 is currently racing in the Formula 3000, a step away from the big league.

He recently had a crash after qualifying for his first FIA F3000 Championship race at the Spa-Francorchamps circuit in Belgium last weekend.

Muhyiddin said he still have high hopes for Yoong even though there has been a slight setback with his recent accident.

"But luckily it wasn't too serious. The latest report I read said he is already able to walk even though it is with crutches," he added.

Yoong, when contacted in London yesterday, said he would try to race in the next leg of the Italian Championship in Misano next week.

"I couldn't use my left leg yet as the tendon at the ankle has snapped and need a major surgery," he said in a telephone interview.

"However, I can still brake with my right leg and I think I can still drive a car. I hope by next week, I can recover enough to race."

Yoong will leave London tomorrow for Italy.

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