

PM: Tour shifts to greater heights

MS7 2/1/2000
By Ramlan Said

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is happy that the Le Tour de Langkawi has been accepted by the world cycling community.

He said ratings had also gone up, a feat of sorts for the event which only entered its fifth season this year.

"Initially, the idea was only to have a small bicycle race around the island of Langkawi, thus the name Le Tour de Langkawi, but the organisers felt it should be turned into a bigger event," he said at the closing of the 12-stage race at Dataran Merdeka yesterday.

Judging from its success so far, Dr Mahathir, who first mooted the idea for the event, said it was heading towards greater heights.

"This year's race is the biggest ever, attracting participants from all over the world, including the United States.

"The foreign teams have been dominating the race so far but I am sure the Malaysian side will one day emerge champions, but they have to train harder," he said.

The Prime Minister was also grateful that the event

had won the support of Malaysians.

"For example, during the 11th stage in Shah Alam yesterday, a huge crowd turned up to cheer the cyclists despite it being the first day of the Chinese New Year."

Dr Mahathir urged the people to seriously take up cycling from young, expressing confidence that if they did not give up hope and trained hard, they would become world-class cyclists.

The Prime Minister hoped everybody, including the foreign officials and media, had a good time during the race and would come back to visit the country.

At a Press conference later, Dr Mahathir said he was confident that with the quality of the race improving each year, the Le Tour de Langkawi would one day emerge as one of the main cycling events in the world, perhaps equalling the Le Tour de France.

On why certain states were excluded from the race, Dr Mahathir said logistical problems had made it more difficult to stage parts of the race in states like Sabah and Sarawak.