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28 teams for Premier Cup

Gerald Louis

THE four-day Premier Cup Final starting at Bukit Kiara Equestrian & Country Resort on Wednesday will feature 28 local clubs and international riders from Thailand and Indonesia.

At the launch of the competition at Bukit Kiara yesterday, Abdul Razak Latiff, chairman of ARL Marketing Sdn Bhd - organisers of the Premier Cup Final - was optimistic the competition would create a better awareness of the sport among Malaysians.

"The public's perception of equestrian is still narrow. It is undoubtedly an expensive sport and many consider it as an elitist activity. We hope to change that by encouraging the sport amongst students and young children," said Abdul Razak.

The Premier Cup Final is the culmination of the Premier Cup Series, held twice a year, with the Premier Cup Challenge in April and followed by the coming Premier Cup Final.

The Premier Cup was first introduced in 1991, in honour of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"As organisers, we feel it necessary to encourage greater competition and performance from the riders. With international participation, the standard of equestrian in the country will improve and the public will then be interested," he said.

The Premier Cup Final will comprise two categories, Dressage and Show Jumping, with 42 classes and 121 riders, and 138 horses from 560 entries.

The events in the Dressage competition will be from the Preliminary Pony to the Advance Horse, while Show Jumping will be from Grade F to the Grand Prix level.

Competitors will include the junior riders (under-16) young riders (16-21 years) and senior riders (21 and above), and Abdul Razak is confident the broad category of riders would contribute to a more diverse competition.

The Malaysian Equine Council, Equestrian Association of Malaysia, National Sports Council and the Kuala Lumpur Municipal Council (DBKL) are involved in the Premier Cup Final, with support from Bukit Kiara Equestrian & Country Resort.

On the future of equestrian in Malaysia, Abdul Razak was hopeful more students and the young would take part in horse-riding. With support from the National Sports Council (NSC), selected students could train under a special Youth Development Programme to prepare them for competitions.

Currently, five students are undergoing daily training sessions at the Bukit Jalil Sports School and according to Malik Jeremiah, secretary of the Malaysian Equine Council, the training would improve their standards for international competitions.

NSC are also determined to co-ordinate the proposed coaching and training programmes for students with the participation from MEC, for students with the enthusiasm in horse-riding and equestrian.

At present, about 20 teachers from the Ulu Kinta Teaching College in Ipoh have been sent for coaching lessons in horse-riding and they recently completed their first stage of lessons.

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