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Mahathir-Cycling

DR MAHATHIR HOPES LTdL WILL BECOME A WORLD CLASS CYCLING EVENT

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 6 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he is happy that Le Tour de Langkawi (LTdL) is well accepted by the international cycling community and hopes that it will become one of the best cycling events in the world.

Dr Mahathir also urged Malaysians to take up cycling at a young age so that Malaysia would be able to produce world class champions in the future.

He said since its inception five years ago, the LTdL had grown from strength to strength and this year's addition was the biggest race.

"We have participants from all over the world including first-timer America which has done extremely well," he said in his speech marking the end of the 12th stage race of the LTdL, at the Merdeka Square, here.

Dr Mahathir hoped that the grading for the tournament would go up so that more world class riders would come here to participate.

Dr Mahathir also expressed his gratitude over the support shown by Malaysians who turned up in full force at the various stage to encourage the cyclists.

He said the initial idea was to have a small-scale race around the island of Langkawi but the organisers thought that it should be made bigger by taking the world famous Tour de France as a model.

This was made possible with the support of Malaysians from all walks of life, volunteers, government agencies and corporate sponsors as well as local and foreign cycling officials.

"I am so proud with the support shown by everyone, including in Selangor yesterday where the people turned up in big numbers despite the Chinese New Year celebration...dragon or no dragon the cycling will go on," he quipped.

Dr Mahathir praised the American team Mercury which won the overall title in their debut and commended the home team which he said had performed "not too badly".

He also hoped that the foreign teams would come back with their family and friends to visit this peaceful country and savour Malaysian hospitality and its various places of attraction.

Later at a news conference, he said efforts would be made to attract more well-known riders, including the possibility of increasing the prize money.

Asked why some of the states in Malaysia were not included in the 1,600-km tour, Dr Mahathir said due to logistical problem, it was impossible to include all the states in Malaysia.

"But we will look into it in the future," he said.

Dr Mahathir also gave away prizes to winners of the various categories after the completion of the 12-round criterium which took the cyclists around the city on the last day of the gruelling tour.

-- BERNAMA

AR/MAM RM