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Dr M: Nation has gained much from the Sepang circuit

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SEPANG, Sun. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Sepang International Circuit had brought much gain to the country and was built in the national interest.

He said during races, footage from Sepang and advertisements on Malaysia were shown repeatedly for hours to more than 600 million people around the world.

Dr Mahathir said from the aspect of advertising Malaysia to the world, he believed it would cost RM2 billion, giving as an example the screening of a promotional film on Malaysia over television in Japan which he said would cost RM1 million per minute.

"I want to reiterate that we have invested many millions in building the circuit but we have had returns many times over. If we see it from the value of national interest, the value of this circuit is 10 times more than our spending (on it)," he told reporters after launching and later watching races at the Malaysian Motorcycle Grand Prix at the Sepang International Circuit (SIC).

"If we want wide exposure, we have to spend RM2 billion, maybe more. But this way, we invest RM280 million for the circuit, twice what we spend for tourism promotion for two years.

"But the returns are very big for, besides advertising benefits, we get tourists coming here. They spent RM500 million during the Formula One races and I am confident that in the coming years many more would come," Dr Mahathir said.

He added that SIC chairman Tan Sri Basir Ismail informed him today that bookings for the Formula One race had already totalled RM15 million while reservations had been made for hotel rooms.

On complaints that prices of tickets to races at SIC were high, he said he would discuss the matter with Basir on reducing the cost.

On the Opposition's contention that the circuit was wasteful, Dr Mahathir said: "For them everything is wasteful. What is not wasteful is when they enter mosques that we built to insult us."

On the KR Modenas engine that was shown to him at the SIC, he said Malaysia must have the ability to design and produce engines.

"That is why we set up the Proton (car) industry. Not so much to make cars but to learn engineering. Now we have the ability in the technique of design and production of engines," Dr Mahathir said.

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