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Sports-Powerboat

MALAYSIAN TO COMPETE IN F1 WORLD POWERBOAT CHAMPIONSHIP

JOHOR BAHRU, Dec 29 (Bernama) -- The new season of the UIM Formula 1 World Powerboat Championship which kicks-off at the Tebrau Straits here in February will for the first time see a Malaysian entry.

Malaysia's possibly lone entry is non other than Tan Sri Azman Hashim, the Arab-Malaysian Banking Group chairman.

If he decides to make his F1 debut, Azman will compete with world-class drivers including Italians Francesco Cantando and five-time world champion Guido Cappellini of Italy and American Scott Gillman.

"Azman Hashim will compete... we have a Malaysian participant this time," Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman told Bernama.

He said at least there is a Malaysian driver in powerboating and Azman's participation in the championship would do the nation proud.

Abdul Ghani said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is scheduled to officiate the championship.

Some foreign royalties will also be coming, he said.

The opening leg of the 14-round championship will be held on Feb 25.

This is the first time that the championship will be held in South-east Asia. The normal venues are Portugal, Belgium, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Italy, Latvia, France, Vienna, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates.

Abdul Ghani said everything is going on smoothly to make the championship a success and the committee involved in hosting the event held their first meeting last Friday.

"We have less than two months before the big day. We hope to be able to organise a grand show," said H2O Sports Sdn Bhd managing director Datuk Yahya Jalil.

H2O Sports Sdn Bhd is the promoter for Asia and the company that is directly responsible for bringing the UIM F1 to Malaysia.

The races are now telecast on the internet and by television to an estimated 90 million viewers.

Gillman, Cantando and Cappellini -- the top three in the world championship standings -- have confirmed their participation for the Johor Baharu Grand Prix.

Gillman emerged the winner of the championship by finishing the final round in third place in Abu Dhabi last month. Cantando was first and Cappellini, second.

For the world championship, the Emirates Team captain Gillman collected 143 points, Cantando came in second with 142 points and defending champion Cappellini was third with 135 points.

Other notable F1 drivers expected here in February are UAE's Awad Al Qubaisi, Italians Fabio Comparato, Massimo Roggiero, Fabrizio Bocca, Franco Leidi and Cipriano Lambri, Duarte Benavente of Portugal, Great Britain's Jonathan Jones, Hungary's Rudolf Mihaldinecz, Philippe Sessertenne of France, Russian Viktor Kunitich, Sami Mikael Selio of Finland, Austria's Rupp Temper and Paul Gaiser of Brazil.

-- BERNAMA

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