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We want to master engine technology: PM

Eirmalasang Bani

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Berhad (Proton) was established not to just manufacture cars but to master the design and production of engines.

"We want to learn more about engineering. Through Proton, we now have the capability of producing good engines," he said at press conference after opening the the Malaysian World Motorcycle Grand Prix in Sepang yesterday.

He was asked on the participation of local companies in the hosting of international events such as the Grand Prix.

"We are also now working with knowledgeable people like those from Kenny Roberts, who can come out with good engines. We also have similar cooperation with Lotus and Mitsubishi," he said.

Dr Mahathir said many people are coming to Malaysia to seek cooperation in the engineering field because they know they can get good cooperation from Malaysians. "Furthermore, the cost is not that high," he said.

The Prime Minister said from the national interest point of view, such events can indirectly bring in more tourists and job opportunities to the country.

Dr Mahathir said tourists who came for the Petronas Malaysian Grand Prix last year spent about RM500 million during the event.

"I am confident that more will come this year ... to date, we have received bookings for the Formula One valued at RM15 million. People have bought tickets and made reservations at our hotels," he said.

He also said by investing through the Sepang F1 Circuit, Malaysia is shown and promoted many times to more than 600 million people throughout the world.

"To get that much exposure we need to spend about RM2 billion, probably more ... but this way, we invested RM280 million for the circuit and it is only twice the amount that we spend in a two year of tourism promotions," he added.

The Sepang F1 Circuit was constructed at a cost of RM320 million. It is managed by SIC, which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Malaysia Airports Berhad.

The SIC manages all motorsport activities, locally and internationally, including the FIA World Championship Formula One Grand Prix and FIM World Motorcycle Championship Grand Prix.

The first Petronas Malaysian Grand Prix, held at the Sepang F1 Circuit last October, bagged the special Formula One Management Award for the best-organised Grand Prix for the year 1999.

Asked to comment on the Opposition's allegation that the Sepang Circuit is a waste of money, Dr Mahathir said: "To them, all is a waste of money."

Dr Mahathir also said he will discuss with SIC chairman Tan Sri Basir Ismail over complaints that tickets for events held at the Sepang F1 Circuit are expensive.

"I will discuss this with him (Basir) so that the ticket prices can be reduced but I would like to reiterate that we have invested millions to build this circuit," he said.

The Malaysian World Motorcycle Grand Prix 2000 is the second in the league of 16 championships, which kicked off in South Africa two weeks ago.

Dr Mahathir also presented prizes to winners in the 125cc category.

A total of seventy-six riders took part in the races yesterday, which involved the 125cc, 250cc and the 500cc categories.

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