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Sports-Ironman (Mahathir)

IRONMAN EVOKES A VALUABLE LESSON TO ALL MALAYSIANS, SAYS DR M

LANGKAWI, Jan 23 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says the fighting spirit of the participants of the Ironman Malaysia Triathlon championship, to be held here on Sunday, evokes a valuable lesson for all Malaysians in facing challenges.

"While it is an honour and privilege for us to once again play host to the Ironman, this competition no doubt evokes a valuable lesson for us all," the Prime Minister said in his message in the championship's souvenir book.

He said nothing was impossible to achieve with individual discipline, fortitude and resilience in the face of challenges.

"I would like to take the opportunity to commend all athletes to the Ironman Malaysia Triathlon 2001 for their exemplification of the 'Semangat Waja' or Heart of Steel value that we wish to inspire in our people," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Ironman Triathlon truly demonstrated the power and determination of the human spirit.

"To swim, cycle and run a combined distance of 226.2km over land and sea within a time span of 17 hours is triumph enough for any ordinary human", he said.

In welcoming the triathletes for the second Ironman challenge here, Dr Mahathir said he was happy that from a mere hundred participants in the debut race last year, the field had enlarged three fold.

This augured well for the sport and for Malaysia's tourism industry in general, he said.

More than 300 competitors from 32 nations have confirmed their participation as against 120 triathletes last year. The professional category sees the entry of 24 men and 12 women competitors, as against five each last year.

Dr Mahathir congratulated the organiser, Langkawi Ironman Endurance Marathon (LIEM) Sdn Bhd, for promoting this event internationally and for putting Langkawi in the international limelight as Malaysia's premier tourist destination.

Sunday's event, which is the curtain raiser for the qualifying rounds of the World Championship in Hawaii, has attracted top world competitors including world woman triathlete champion Natascha Badmann, third runner-up in the last world championship, Lothar Leder of Germany and Ironman Malaysia defending champion Kaoru Matsuda of Japan.

The limelight will also be shared by Ironman Malaysia runner-up Glen Gore (South Africa), second runner-up Stephen Farrel of New Zealand as well as Malaysia's professional triathlete, Mohamad Razani Hussein.

Meanwhile, Canadian Don Terlson, a physically challenged triathlete, said he was ready to meet the challenges and "see my limitation" in this gruelling event.

"All I need is mental strength to put myself through all the barriers," said Terlson, 42, who managed to complete the event in 14hours and 2 minutes at the Ironman Canada championship in 1995," she said.

Terlson, who suffered disability on the left hand since he was 19, said he had faced many difficulties since becoming an Ironman participant in 1994, including cracking his rib after falling from his specially built-bicycle and being stung by bees.

He said the swimming segment would be the toughest for him and that he

knew that he will be facing different obstacles at different venues.

Another professional triathlete, Belinda Cheney of Australia, who chose not to reveal her real goal, said she comes here to gain experience besides making a lot of new friends.

"Ironman championships are like the gathering of one big family and I enjoyed my stay here and especially happy with the people's hospitality here," said Cheney who clocked 9 hours and 50 minutes in the Ironman Australia Triathlon last year.

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