

23/04/2001

PM: Nurture volunteerism

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - The culture of volunteerism should be nurtured in the country as it brought many benefits, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"I hope this attitude of volunteering will develop so we can have more events like this because if we pay wages to all workers in an event that is held nationwide then surely we will not be able to stage it."

The Prime Minister said this in his speech at a show of appreciation function for the sponsors and volunteers of the 2001 Telekom Malaysia Le Tour de Langkawi held in February.

He said it was clear that the culture of volunteerism had arrived in Malaysia as could be seen when many contributed their time and energy to make the tour a success.

He said he was a regular visitor to the Oshkosh Air Show in Wisconsin, United States, where thousands of self-made airplanes were displayed, an event organised by a small organisation.

During the show about 10,000 people volunteered their services to make the show a success, he added.

"What is interesting to me is that how clean the area is. There are no plastic bags, empty tins or bottles. Everything is into places provided and they take care that everything is clean even though the event also takes a long time, about a week, but everything is clean due to work done by those who contribute their time and energy through volunteering," he said.

He said media coverage of the Le Tour de Langkawi did not only show the race but also the sights in Malaysia which made the country better known to attract more tourists.

"And when they tour Malaysia, certainly many of us will profit...many benefits," Dr Mahathir said, adding that efforts were being made to increase the number of tourists to Malaysia.

He said one problem faced by Malaysia in the past was that it was not as well known as Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand or the Philippines due to Malaysia being a new name coined after the merger of the peninsula with Sabah and Sarawak

"That was the situation of Malaysia, not well known before. Now it is well known that anywhere we go and say Malaysia, people know where it is, its successes and they have heard about Le Tour de Langkawi, the F1 race and the like," he added.

He thanked Malaysians for their support for the event by coming out in crowds to watch the race.

"Without spectators, definitely an event like this would not be interesting. They raised the spirit of those involved in the race.

"Alhamdulillah, in Malaysia, the people are more supportive than before, (when they were) less demonstrative, not showing their feelings. Sometimes they did not clap.

"I found them very supportive as they clapped and shouted to encourage riders in the race and this provided a good picture," he said, adding it also encouraged those involved in the Le Tour de Langkawi to repeatedly take part.

He hoped Malaysians would come in greater numbers to watch the race as it was a world sport event that was free of charge thanks to the sponsors.

Dr Mahathir was proud that the race, which was originally intended to be

in Langkawi only, had become a nationwide race.

"I am happy with the success of the Le Tour de Langkawi, something that we did not expect to develop so fast. Even though it is not something to be compared to the Tour de France and others but it has become one of the world programme for cycle racing," he said.

Dr Mahathir hoped for continued efforts to make the race a success and thanked the organisers, sponsors, the police, the Armed Forces Medical Corps, the Fire and Rescue Department, the media, race officials, volunteers and contractors.

He said the achievement of this year's tour was encouraging as the race had 175 riders. Out of 25 teams, seven took part for the first time while five were from Div 1 compared to only one last year.

"For the first time we had a team from Spain. The 2001 Tour established a world record when the Dungun-Kuantan stage was completed at an average speed of 51.94 km/h, the previous record was 51.14 km/h set during a stage in the 1998 Tour de Spain," he said.

Dr Mahathir later presented souvenirs and certificates to sponsors and volunteers.

He also presented prizes to winners of a TV quiz held in conjunction with the tour.

The lucky main prize winner was Atiyansa @ Mardhiyah Mohd Salleh who won a Proton Wira 1.5 along with other prizes.

Dr Mahathir also launched a "Malaysia Boleh" SEA Games 2001 signature campaign.