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Tour to be shorter next year

Zakri Baharudin

LE Tour de Langkawi, which is looking at a 2.2 upgrade after successfully completing its sixth edition last February, will be reduced from 12 to 10 days from next year.

Complying with the International Cycling Union's (UCI) directive for the 2001 season, Malaysia's RM1.5 million annual cycle race will nevertheless emerge as the longest in Asia.

"Only the major Tours in France, Italy and Spain are not affected by this new ruling," said Tour organisers First Cartel (M) Sdn Bhd's executive chairman Datuk Wan Lokman Ibrahim in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

"Starting next year, all national Tours in Europe will be limited to seven days while other races will only run for a maximum of five days.

"However, as UCI are hoping to encourage more races outside Europe, the Tour de Langkawi was given special consideration with 10 days and a rest day in between."

Wan Lokman said UCI decided to impose the new ruling based on riders' feedback, most of whom consider the duration of some races a bit too 'severe'.

Having no effect on its current 2.3 status, the revised 2002 10-day Tour, which is set to flag off on Feb 7 next year, could even be classed as a 2.2 event.

"Personally, I wasn't in a rush to get another upgrade but many people have urged me to go for it. For that, we will apply for a 2.2 classification for 2002," said Wan Lokman.

"A 2.2 race will limit the participation of national teams to 20 per cent of the field, which we hope to maintain at 175 riders.

Wan Lokman said this at a ceremony to congratulate sponsors, government and non-governmental agencies, States, technical officials, volunteers and media representatives who were involved in the 2001 Tour on Feb 6-18.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also patron of the Tour, handed out the appreciation certificates and awards.

Representing the Tour's family of sponsors were Petronas chairman Tan Sri Azizan Zainul Abidin, Genting Berhad chairman Tan Sri Lim Goh Tong, Telekom Malaysia Berhad chairman Datuk Ir Md Radzi Mansor, Gamuda Berhad managing director Datuk Lin Yun Ling, Proton's director of operations Datuk Kisai Rahmat and Nestle's managing director Jose Lopez.

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