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Mahathir-F1

MALAYSIA VERY SAFE- DR MAHATHIR

SEPANG, March 23 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, said today the successful organisation of the 2003 Petronas Malaysian Grand Prix at the Sepang F1 Circuit showed that Malaysia is very safe.

With the Iraq war entering its third day today, the Prime Minister said he was very much relieved and happy that despite the travel advisory issued by some countries that Malaysia was not safe, a lot of foreigners especially Europeans were here to see the race and they are safe.

"It is a race without any accident and people will see that it is completely safe to come to Malaysia, to be in a big crowd. More than hundred thousand people... and there were no (untoward) incidents," he told reporters at the end of the race.

Earlier Dr Mahathir presented prizes to McLaren's driver Kimi Raikkonen who won the race.

The Prime Minister said that if indeed there were terrorists in Malaysia surely they would take advantage of the big crowd which had gathered here for this FI race, to display their talents.

On the European Minardi Cosworth team's move to display a sticker which read "Malaysians for Peace" in their racing cars, Dr Mahathir said it was good because it was also Malaysia's desire to have a peaceful world.

"We want the world to be at peace so that the race like the one we had today can be held...so that tourists from all over the world can meet each other and foster good relations...instead of waging war, killing and so on."

He also said that the team's move was good despite their drivers being British and Australian -- allies in the US-led attack on Iraq.

Expressing satisfaction over the successful holding of the race, Dr Mahathir praised the International Automobile Federation (FIA) for the new rules which it had introduced , which he said had added more excitement to the 56-lap race.

Dr Mahathir when asked about Malaysia's achievements in motor sports, said Malaysians should be interested in this sport as it was related to motor engineering.

He said from the racing car engineering, they would better understand about building normal motor car engines.

"Our aim is not just to have a race...but also to attract more tourists to Malaysia and also to expose Malaysians to race engineering technology."

Asked which team he preferred, he said surely it is Sauber Petronas.

He hoped that Petronas would improve their performances over time.

Sauber Pertronas's driver, Nick Heidfeld and Heinz Harald Frentzen finished in eighth and ninth places respectively, in today's race.

The Prime Minister said a country needed to have nearly 30,000 spectators on the ground to stage a good race which was watched by 350 million people throughout the world.

"So our ability to stage this race and to have it witnessed by 350 million people means that Malaysia will become well known and a good destination for tourists," he said.

In the first year in 1999, some 80,000 people came to watch the race in Sepang, the number went up to 88,000 in 2000, came down to 75,000 in 2001 and topped 92,500 last year. This year an estimated 100,000 watched the race.

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