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Private sector must do their part

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A FACILITY and platform is what the Sepang F1 Circuit is, and it is up to the public and corporate sector to join hands and support the growth of Malaysian motorsports.

While the Government has constructed the RM300 million circuit for the country, Sepang International Circuit (SIC) chairman Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir is perplexed at how some seem to believe it is up to the Government to also develop motorsports.

"We (SIC) are the organisers and promoters of motorsports events and with that, our role is limited. We are the manager of the circuit and we work within the constraints of Malaysia Airports Berhad (MAB), who are the owners," said Mokhzani.

Mokhzani added that hosting of world class motorsports events such as the Petronas Formula One Malaysian Grand Prix and the Malaysian Motorcycle Grand Prix, were means by which motorsports could be promoted, while serving as formidable platforms to generate both tourism Ringgit and the promotion of the country abroad.

"For example, the cost of having the circuit was RM300 million and we had a group of university students doing a study on the impact of the first F1 Grand Prix in 1999 which showed the event generated RM500 million in revenue for the country," Mokhzani disclosed.

"We provide the platform and we showcase the top level of motorsports to the country. But you can't expect us or the Government to develop motorsports as well. That's not our role."

Asked who should be expected to develop motorsports, Mokhzani said it is up to the public and the private sector to channel their support towards motorsports.

Sepang has on its calendar, besides the two world championship rounds, a round of the Japan GT Championship, the Asian Festival of Speed (AFOS), the FIM Asia Road Racing Championship and recently signed a contract to host one round of the Formula Nippon series.

"We provide the platform to showcase these events and to show that this is the level that we want to target. Then it is up to the rest to come in and support and help develop drivers and riders," said Mokhzani.

Eight rounds of the Malaysian Super Series are run at the circuit, while one round of the Malaysian Cub Prix Championship and the Merdeka Millenium Endurance Race (MME) complete the circuit's local calendar.

"Through the local events, we can identify talent. We can create the industry whereby local technology is developed. If you want to see the talent being developed, then the private sector must come into motorsports and support the drivers they feel have the potential," added Mokhzani.

"Before the Government came in and built the Sepang Circuit, motorsports was run mostly by the private sector. But somehow, now just because the Government is involved, people seem to think that the Government should do everything.

"The Government has provided the base and the facility and now the public should come forward and play their part."

He added that the six years of Sepang Circuit's existence is not a sufficient period to gauge success, and that the F1 Malaysian Grand Prix will continue to serve as a platform to promote motorsports as it is contracted to be hosted by the Sepang Circuit until 2010.