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SIC chief: Keep politics out of Sepang F1 Circuit

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Don't make the Petronas Malaysian Grand Prix 2004 at the Sepang International Circuit a campaign ground for the general election.

This was the appeal made yesterday at a Press conference by Sepang International Circuit (SIC) chairman Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir.

Urging the public not to display campaign paraphernalia at the track during the race period on March 19-21, he said: "I urge the people not to make this race a stamping-ground for politics. I hope that when they come, they come as racing fans and not as political campaigners."

The Malaysian Grand Prix will be televised live to a global audience and Mokhzani fears the image of the country may be unwittingly tarnished by well-meaning members of the public keen to show their political affiliations at the track.

As polling day falls on race day, March 21, organisers are re-thinking their strategy to get the 120,000-capacity stands packed.

Since many locals may stay away, Mokhzani announced the SIC had expanded its marketing and promotion efforts to attract ticket buyers from Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, China, Hong Kong and India.

Also, with heavy traffic anticipated, helicopter services provided by Sabah Air and Malaysian Helicopter Service will have their frequency increased to transport voters from the Sungai Besi and Subang airbases to the circuit.

SIC Press officer Azhar Ghazali revealed that Malaysia Airlines' assistance had been sought, which could see flights to the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang being increased on race day.

As of yesterday, confirmed and paid-for ticket sales were 25,000, up from 20,000 last week.