

09/03/2004

SIC banking on foreigners to meet 120,000-spectator target

ZAIDI ISHAM ISMAIL

THE organisers of the Formula 1 race are confident that foreign ticket sales will offset any local shortfall that may arise from having the race day fall on the same day as the general election in Malaysia.

Sepang International Circuit Sdn Bhd (SIC) estimates that 50,000 foreigners will come to see the race, making up 40 per cent of the 120,000 expected at the Sepang F1 circuit.

Last year, just over 100,000 people bought tickets, of which 40 per cent were foreigners.

SIC made more than RM50 million from ticket sales last year, but will be challenged to repeat the takings as Malaysia goes to the poll on the same Sunday as the second leg of the Formula 1 race.

SIC chairman Datuk Mokhzani Tun Dr Mahathir said that as at yesterday, SIC had sold more than 25,000 tickets worth about RM9 million, almost 60 per cent higher than in the corresponding period last year.

"Ticket sales are still coming in strong. We believe it will continue to increase within the next 13 days," Mokhzani said yesterday.

"Apart from our traditional markets such as Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei and Thailand, there is also keen interest from South Africa," he added.

Mokhzani said that last year, more than 8,500 sales originated from the Singapore market, which did not include sales made at the circuit and through its outlets in Malaysia for Singaporeans coming into Malaysia.

"The strategy is to double last year's numbers from Singapore by boosting promotion activities to woo more fans in the republic," said Mokhzani.

He added that SIC has also requested its five official ticketing agents in Singapore to push up their sales and that similar emphasis will be given to wooing spectators from Thailand, Brunei and Indonesia.

He also said that the whole of Hillstand G, which has a capacity of 25,000 spectators, has been reserved for school children and college students on Friday and Saturday. On race day (March 21), SIC is offering special RM50 tickets.

"The event will clash with polling day and my message to all local racing fans is simple - cast your votes early. The race starts at 3pm, so there will be more than ample time."

Mokhzani said that this is the first time in Formula 1 history that a host country is having elections on the same day as the race. Apart from spectators, some 4,000 local workers on race day will be involved during polling day.

"However, it will not disrupt our strategies and there is no reason for people not being able to come."

He said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi will be on hand to present prizes to the winners of the race.

He urged race goers not to spoil the race with political elements, such as bringing in banners or carrying out campaigning activities.

SIC has 60 foreign-based ticketing agents scattered throughout Europe, while promotions done in the build-up have touched China, India, the UK, Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore.

(END)