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Malaysia sails into the world map

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THE upgraded Royal Langkawi Yacht Club with a capacity to berth 201 boats, has reserved half of its berthing areas for yachts involved in the March 11-16 regatta for the 'Prime Minister's Challenge Trophy.'

Under the helm of Tunku Abdullah Tuanku Abdul Rahman, chairman and commodore of the club, an aggressive promotional campaign begun late last year with invitations, posters and advertisements reaching yacht clubs all over the world, has brought positive response from 70 boats.

"Some boats may drop out but we will be happy with 60 yachts as it is a manageable figure for an international event although we are prepared to accept any number. With the boats involved in organisation of the event, supply boats and regulars which berth there, the RLYC will have a carnival atmosphere," said Tunku Abdullah.

He said the RLYC, having played host to the final legs of the Raja Muda regatta from Port Klang to Langkawi for the past years, had decided to organise one of its own as part of the nation's vision to promote marine tourism.

"Malaysia has a vast coastline and numerous beautiful beaches but interest in sailing has not caught on with the majority of the population. We hope by bringing some top class sailing action, will not only help promote tourism, but also inject the sailing bug among the people, especially the youngsters.

"The event will also draw boats competing in the Andaman Race on Feb 14-28 while a special Rebak Champagne Run is organised for 25 boats which are leaving Phuket and heading for Langkawi for the regatta.

"So far we have entries from Australia, the United States, Britain, New Zealand, Singapore, Thailand and the Caribbean while yacht clubs from around the country will also be sending a fleet of racers to duel with the foreign boats on the high seas," he said.

Tunku Abdullah said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was the first person to broach the idea of a regatta in Langkawi to promote yachting and bring more sailors and tourists to the island.

The regatta promises to be exciting with the yachts split into two divisions. The larger division, comprising boats with the International Racing Certification registered handicap, will vie for the Prime Minister's Challenge Trophy while the club-registered cruisers will compete for the RLYC's Commodore Cup.

A total of seven class of races would be held over four days through an exciting array of courses that had been drawn by the race committee and experienced and renown regatta manager Robert Forrester.

With the meteorological services department predicting a wind force of 12 to 15 knots during the period, the regatta, which takes the yachts through some of the most scenic islands, is expected to be exciting, fun-filled and will test the skills and sailing knowledge of all the crew.

"The lure of Langkawi is bound to be a big pull factor to international sailors who are looking towards new waters to 'play' especially since many are bored with the traditional sailing routes. This event is going to be an annual one and will be a prominent feature in the Asian Yachting Circuit," Tunku Abdullah said.

He said the RM450 race registration fee for a skipper and a crew of three and an additional RM150 for every extra crew member was very reasonable and would be a major attraction for boat owners to sign up for

the regatta.

"Sailors and spectators are ensured of exciting races and a gala time and a UK-based television company will be filming the event for distribution to international television networks which is bound to put Malaysia on a sound footing on the world map of sailing," he added.