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PM: Odd that tropics work well for others, but not for us

Arnaz M. Khairul

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, upon numerous requests, shared a few words of wisdom as he handed out prizes to winners in the Telekom Malaysia Le Tour de Langkawi (LTdL) at the Merdeka Square in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

While praising the country and its people for their support in ensuring the success of the eighth edition of the LTdL, Dr Mahathir said he was also amazed at the way "people from temperate climates" performed in the tropics.

"I thank you for making this a great race and helping it to be upgraded. Soon all the top riders will want to come here to be part of this race in the tropics to mark their achievements.

"It may be a bit odd, but I can see that people from rather temperate climates can do quite well compared to those in the tropics," said Dr Mahathir.

Surely, it is obvious that while in other sports Malaysians manage to perform better at home where the climate usually suits them, the national cyclists have constantly failed to perform in the LTdL.

This year's LTdL has also proven so, with the national team barely managing to stay ahead of rivals the Philippines to avoid finishing last.

While the Malaysian National Cycling Federation (MNCF) has done little to improve the situation by initiating a widespread effective, reliable and sustainable development programme, it looks like LTdL organisers First Cartel Sdn Bhd are the ones the country will count on for cycling to, at least, remain alive in Malaysia.

This was evident even before the LTdL began 10 days ago, when First Cartel executive chairman Datuk Wan Lokman Wan Ibrahim announced a year-round training programme of which 15 national cyclists will be selected for.

The programme, said Wan Lokman, would be launched right after the LTdL with an aim of giving exposure to the national cyclists by competing in various regional Tours, with the hope of improving their conditioning before the set targets of this year's Gamuda Eagle Tour and the Sea Games in Vietnam in December.

"We will get that programme underway because that is the least we can do to help the sport. We aren't trying to take away the MNCF's duties, but we are doing it because we like the sport and to improve our national team.

"By the end of February, we will finalise the 15 trainees and start the programme. This will be a mix of young and experienced national cyclists," said Wan Lokman yesterday.

The First Cartel national cyclists training programme also includes a diet and nutritional plan, and is done in collaboration with the Kuala Lumpur and Selangor CAs.

"We would like to see more being done to develop the sport. But that is as far as we can go. It isn't our duty to do development and I don't want to question the MNCF on this issue. I also don't know what they have in mind.