

Dr M wants M'sia's F1 team to perform well in Bahrain
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Former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia's formula one team, Lotus Racing, must perform well in Bahrain next month to maintain the Lotus image and brand.

He said he believed that the team had their own mission to do their level best as failure to deliver would tarnish the famous name that they carried.

Dr Mahathir, who played an important role in setting up motoring sports in Malaysia, was speaking at the reporters after officially opening the team's factory in Norfolk, Norwich on Monday.

He was joined by the team's principal Tony Fernandes, his deputies Kamaruddin Meranun and SM Nasaruddin SM Nasimuddin, chief executive officer Riad Asmat and chief technical officer Mike Gascoyne.

Dr Mahathir jokingly said that the team's ability in building the car in such a short span of time had caused him to "lose his bet".

"I came here because I did not believe that they could get the car ready in time so I challenged them. You get your car ready and I will come to visit, so they got their car ready.

"So I lost my bet... fortunately no money involved," he said.

He said it took at least a year to build up a car, even with a prototype, thus it was very impressive when a team as small as Lotus Racing managed to get it done only in five months.

"I'm very impressed and can see that they have been very lucky that they found a factory hall ready for making cars. The factory belonged originally to Toyota and Audi and everything is in place so they have little need to do or add anything," he said.

He said it was also amazing that the team managed to gather quite a number of people who were very familiar with car-making.

Earlier, during a visit to the factory, Dr Mahathir was given an opportunity to sit in the Lotus Cosworth T127 Chassis 02 while the engine was fired up.

Meanwhile, Fernandes said Lotus Racing was competing with the best in the world and he believed that it would do its level best despite having to operate with a limited budget.

It was not about having a lot of money but more about showing their true abilities to the world, particularly as Malaysians, he said.

Denying claims that the team had failed to attract sponsors because of its unknown abilities, he said:

"I know there's a lot of scepticism here but first of all, we only had five months, other teams had 10 years. Just wait and see and we did not put any time frame to bring in the sponsors.

"Our target for now is we want to finish the first four races. No, we don't aim for any positions.

"You race with the Ferrari and they have been racing since 1930, that has been 80 years and we only five months of age.

"Ferrari's budget is substantially higher than us, so get behind us and let's show the world what we can do."

Many people, he said, had asked about the budget but history had proven that having tons of money was not a key to success.

"I have great people. The energy, the innovation is something that money can't buy so I'm not too worried about it.

"Of course we would like to have big sponsors who could have give us a large cheque and we can be more competitive but that doesn't happen and we will make do with what we have," he added.

- *Bernama*

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