

F1 fever hots up with rain

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had a great time at yesterday's 2012 Petronas Malaysia Grand Prix race.

SEPANG: The race that had to be temporarily suspended following a downpour further added to the drama on the track and kept the prime minister, other VIPs and about 85,000 spectators on the edge of their seats throughout the 56-lap race.

Sepang International Circuit (SIC) chairman Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir later said that Najib had told him to continue organising electrifying races before SIC's contract with Formula One ended in 2015.

"He (Najib) has asked me how the government could assist SIC in this, and I think a lot more can be done to have exciting programmes leading to the race day," he said after Fernando Alonso of Ferrari took the chequered flag at the 14th edition of the Malaysian Grand Prix.

Also present were Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Abdul Halim Muad'zam Shah, Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Hajah Haminah, former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Najib's wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor and Deputy International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Mukhriz Mahathir.

Mokhzani said 119,960 spectators had turned up over the weekend for this year's edition of the race.

Asked whether SIC would consider starting the race earlier than 4pm to avoid afternoon downpours, he said there was no move to do so for now.

"The weather has been very unpredictable lately, still we had a rip-roaring race."

On when Malaysia would start its negotiations prior to the expiry of the circuit's F1 contract, Mokhzani said: "End of next year."

Earlier, local celebrities, including pop diva Datuk Siti Nurhaliza and national squash queen Datuk Nicol Ann David, visited the F1 teams at the pit lane.

Nicol, who wore a mustard-coloured dress, said she would throw her support behind the Lotus team.

"If I am given the opportunity to drive an F1 car, I will go for the Lotus team.

"This is my first time to the Sepang F1 circuit and it has been fun so far," she added.

The three teams with Malaysian connections were the Mercedes AMG Petronas F1 team, Lotus F1 team and Caterham F1 team.

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