

By : **DATO' SRI MOHD NAJIB BIN TUN HAJI ABDUL RAZAK
PERDANA MENTERI MALAYSIA**

Venue : **SRI PERDANA, PUTRAJAYA**

Date : **07/04/2011**

Title : **F1 WELCOME COCKTAIL**

1. Let me first wish everybody a warm 'Selamat Datang' and welcome back to Malaysia.
2. We had a pretty exciting season-opener in Melbourne and I am sure each and every one of us here is really looking forward to the second race of the season here in Sepang for the 13th edition of the Formula 1 PETRONAS Malaysia Grand Prix.
3. Indeed, it seems fairly recent, but it has in fact been it has been 13 years since that memorable first race in Sepang on October 17, 1999.
4. There was Rubens Barrichello in his white Ford Stewart; Jarno Truli with Prost Racing Team; and of course, Michael Schumacher, then with Scuderia Ferrari; returning from injury and unfortunately, already out of the title race that season.
5. So, as the race turned out, Michael finished second; though I was very confident that he could win that day. Rubens took fifth place and Truli had mechanical problems. Michael and race winner Eddie Irvine was then disqualified; but one week later, the two were reinstated as first and second; and Eddie had a chance to challenge Mika Hakkinen for the 1999 world crown at the final race in Japan.
6. So, anyway that's how interesting the formula one races are; that many years after particular race is over we can still recall the exhilarating moments that draw so many millions of us to follow each race so closely and passionately. Frankly while we're on the subject, I would still want to know from Michael how he lost that race in 1999 ?
7. Anyway, 1999 was a landmark year for us in Malaysia. We showed the world that we can organize world class events. The inaugural Formula 1 PETRONAS Malaysia Grand Prix underlined further our capabilities after it was named by the FIA as the Best Organised Grand Prix for the Year.
8. It also basically transformed Malaysian motorsports. The general interest among the fans shot drastically; we have kids daring to dream to become professional racing drivers; enthusiasts making initiatives to set up racing teams and birth of new racing series.
9. For Sepang International Circuit; it became a world icon and a benchmark of the new racing circuits in the new millennium. I am also proud to say here that our success stories inspired our Asian friends to follow our path and bid to become host venues for Formula 1.
10. If the Bahrain Grand Prix was not cancelled last month, seven of the 20 rounds for this season would be in Asia; and that's how much motorsports had progressed in the Asian region. Today, thanks to the Formula 1 World Championship, motorsport has transformed by leaps and bounds.

11. But, the Formula 1 project has always been more than just a motorsports agenda. It's much, much bigger than that. When Malaysia first initiated the idea, it was a tool to uplift Malaysia's image at the international arena. Formula 1 is now the third biggest global sporting event after the Olympics and the football World Cup. But unlike Formula 1, the Olympics and the World Cup come only four times a year.

12. Here, in Formula 1, we have an annual championship that has no less than 18 rounds per year; commanding TV viewership of billions of people worldwide. All the races are telecast live around the globe; with TV viewership for the live telecast reaching more than 400 million viewers.

13. You add that to TV highlights, previews and reviews; special programmes; website magazines; Facebook and twitters updates, you would be reaching billions. So, at a single stroke in 1999 - though I sincerely hope Bernie and his FOM team would not be using this to increase their fees – Malaysia simply captured the attention of millions of people worldwide.

14. And, thanks to the FIA stewards for disqualifying Michael, Eddie and their Ferrari team, Malaysia was the hottest story in motorsports for one entire week. As a nation that has always placed tourism as one of its key revenue earner, the Formula 1 PETRONAS Malaysia Grand Prix has always been a strong, effective tool. Some 80,000 spectators came for the inaugural race in 1999 and 35 percent are foreign tourists.

15. An independent study by the University of Malaya showed that an astounding of USD144 million in foreign exchange collection can be attributed to Formula 1 in Sepang, based on the spending by foreigners during the F1 period, including most of you that were there in Sepang for the race. So, thank you for spending and contribution to our GDP.

16. The impact of Formula 1 hosting for tourism has been massive. If we made almost 150 million in 1999, imagine the benefits that the nation has reaped over the last 11 editions. But of course beyond dollars and cents there is another aspect these races that appeals to us.

17. As a nation aspiring to be a major player in the automotive industry, our alliance with Formula 1 is only natural. In Formula 1, we have the stage for application of the finest and highest technology in the automotive field. In Malaysia, we have a group of young people to take our automotive industry to the highest level possible.

18. In that regard, I must mention all the Malaysian linked groups. I congratulate Proton on their bold move to support the Lotus Renault. And, I congratulate Vitaly Petrov on his amazing podium finish in Melbourne. But, having said that, it does not mean I love Team Lotus less ... they're the 1Malaysia Racing Team and I was the one making the announcement on September 15, 2009 in the Malaysian Parliament.

19. Of course, we also have the other Malaysian team – the Mercedes GP PETRONAS. They did not do too well in Melbourne; but I sincerely believe they will bounce back in Sepang. Who would dare bet against the technical brilliance of Ross Brawn; and, of course, the superb skills of Michael.

20. I am sure that we would be having a great race this weekend in Sepang.

21. Now, with all the early season jitters all overcome in Melbourne and all the teams knowing their cars and rivals better, Sepang will provide the real gauge for each and every team.

22. Lewis had said in Melbourne that he would want to have his revenge in Sepang; so I guess all the McLaren fans will be coming in droves to the circuit to support the 2008 world champion.

23. Personally, however, I believe that it would be an open race this season. Imagine a championship featuring five world champions ... something that is a first in Formula 1 history. I have my favorite, of course, but I am not telling you this evening.

Ladies and gentlemen,

24. Before I end my speech, I would like again to thank everybody for coming this evening. I am told that the most difficult thing to do in F1 is to get the drivers together.... except on the starting grid, where not only will they come together, they will fight for front positions. So, thank you for coming.

25. I would also like to record my highest appreciation and thanks to Bernie and his team from Formula One Management for their confidence in awarding us this prestigious event. Indeed, it has contributed to the enhancement of Malaysia's international profile many ways.

26. My sincere thanks also to the FIA and the All Sports Management for their support and assistance in making our event as successful one over the years.

27. Finally, to the drivers and teams again, my very best wishes and may the best team win.

Thank You.