

VETTEL URGES RENAULT TO STAY IN F1

FOUR-TIME WORLD CHAMPION STILL ON MAXIMUM ATTACK FOR TITLE

SINGAPORE: Four-time world champion Sebastian Vettel yesterday said it was "sad" to hear Renault was ending its partnership with Red Bull and urged the engine-maker to stay in the sport.

Vettel's world titles with Red Bull were all powered by Renault engines but the relationship has soured to the point where the French company is about to walk away. Chairman and CEO Carlos Ghosn this week said Renault would stop supplying engines to other teams and would either run its own outfit or quit F1 altogether. "Obviously it's sad to hear," Ferrari driver Vettel said ahead of the Singapore Grand Prix, when asked about Renault's impending split with his former team.

"I was part of that partnership, we had very successful years which unfortunately now gets forgotten very quickly because of the situation.

"Renault has done a fantastic job in the past, supplying us with a strong engine, supplying us with the latest (engineering). He added that he hoped Renault stayed in the sport. Red Bull and Renault have fallen out during a disappointing season when the Austrian team has dropped well off the pace set by Mercedes, while consistently blaming its engines.

Engine-makers have grappled with the complex technology required by Formula One's hybrid engines, which were introduced last year. Renault are also pursuing a takeover of cash-strapped Lotus, who are fighting a court bid by British tax authorities to put them into administration.

"We have already alerted the F1 authorities and told them: 'Don't count on us as a provider of an



SINGAPORE: Ferrari's German driver Sebastian Vettel (right) walks in the paddock ahead of the Formula One Singapore Grand Prix in Singapore yesterday. — AFP

engine - it's over," Ghosn said this week. "Our future is the subject of detailed analysis and renegotiating," he added. "We will either exit or run our own team. We don't have a clear decision yet." After 12 races this season, Renault-powered Red Bull are fourth in the constructors' standings, behind Mercedes, Ferrari and Williams.

Hunting ground

The quadruple world champion Vettel returns to a happy hunting ground in Singapore this week still on maximum attack for another drivers' title. The Ferrari driver picked up his second win of the year at the Hungarian Grand Prix in July but the dominant form of Briton Lewis Hamilton has allowed the

Mercedes driver to open up a 74-point advantage over Vettel with six races remaining.

Vettel, third in the standings and 21 points behind Hamilton's team mate Nico Rosberg, was optimistic about reducing the deficits at the Marina Bay Street Circuit, where he won three times with Red Bull and also finished second twice. "It is always difficult to predict what is going to happen but this place has been a good place for me, very good results the last couple of years," the 28-year-old told reporters yesterday.

"I really love the track, it is one of the most challenging events we face in the season and I think we have a strong package so hopefully we can keep this record up. "The goal for the championship is maximum attack, we have to go for everything we can get. Obviously Nico is closer to us than to Lewis but as long as the chances are there we have to try and make anything possible that we can do.

"Being realistic Lewis is in a very good position." Hamilton has won seven of the year's races, including the last two in Belgium and Italy, with Rosberg landing the other three but Vettel's consistency-he has achieved eight podiums-has kept him in the hunt in his debut campaign with Ferrari.

"Overall we are always quick enough to go for the top five," Vettel said. "Our target is to be on the podium which is difficult as Mercedes have the strongest package at the moment and if nothing goes wrong they have two cars on the podium and there is not much space left, but we have been pretty good at getting our maximum and most of the time getting that last place." — Agencies

HAZE WOULD BE 'BIG HEALTH RISK': BUTTON

SINGAPORE: Former world champion Jenson Button said yesterday that severe haze would pose a "big health risk" to drivers in the Singapore Grand Prix as organizers remained on edge despite an improvement in air quality.

The 2009 world champion, a dedicated triathlete, told AFP he had to skip outdoor workouts due to the acrid smoke being blown over the city-state from forest and farm fires in neighboring Indonesia.

The haze problem has become a chronic threat to the world's first night-time Formula One race as well as a festering bilateral issue with Indonesia, where fires have traditionally been used to clear land for cultivation.

"It would have been a big health risk if it was as bad as yesterday," the British driver said in an interview, referring to the officially declared "unhealthy" levels of air pollution when he arrived from Phuket, Thailand.

Button, 35, said he practised with professional triathletes over a five-day period in the Thai resort island in preparation for Singapore. The Singapore race is held under floodlights on a narrow and bumpy street circuit which snakes past historic and modern landmarks of the wealthy former British colony. The nearest Indonesian islands are less than an hour away by ferry. "The biggest issue would be coughing in the race but I think it's (worse) post race because you are pushing your body very hard in the race, you're going to have health issues after the race," Button said.

Singapore's air quality was considerably better on Thursday after torrential downpours the past two days, but race officials have warned that conditions could change quickly.

"I think it'll be fine this weekend, fingers crossed," said Button, who was speaking under a gray sky on a boardwalk overlooking the posh Marina Bay race circuit. "We all know that it's not good breathing in fumes. You're racing a car and your heartbeat's very high."

He said for some drivers the heart rate during a race can reach as high as 170 beats per minute. "For me I am lower, I am more relaxed in the car... about 150, 155 which is quite high for me because I do a lot of train-

ing." Organisers said on Tuesday that the haze situation was volatile but there were no plans to change the schedules of the race and related events, including a post-race outdoor concert by rock icon Bon Jovi.

"The haze situation is highly changeable not only from day to day, but from hour to hour," Singapore GP said in a statement.

"Therefore, it is currently not possible to reliably predict what the (pollutant) level might be over the race weekend." — AFP



SINGAPORE: Infiniti Red Bull Racing team members stand by the car of Russian driver Daniil Kvyat in the pit lane ahead of the Formula One Singapore Grand Prix in Singapore yesterday. —AFP

RICCIARDO UNFAZED WHO SUPPLIES RED BULL'S ENGINES NEXT YEAR

SINGAPORE: Red Bull's Daniel Ricciardo is already looking ahead to next season, relishing the prospect of a new engine that he hopes will propel him back up the Formula One pecking order. After winning three races in 2014 and finishing third in the driver's championship, the Australian has endured a frustrating 2015, registering just one podium finish and constant problems with the Renault engine powering Red Bull. But with Renault saying they would stop supplying engines to Formula One teams next year, Red Bull is looking for a new engine.

There are just three other engine suppliers in the sport - Mercedes, Ferrari and Honda - with Red Bull widely expected to use Ferrari engines next year. "My preference is what's fastest... whichever is going to give us the better chance of victory is what I want, Ricciardo told reporters yesterday ahead of this weekend's Singapore Grand Prix.

"If it gets us a better chance to win, I don't really care what it is at this stage." Renault won four championships in a row with Red Bull from 2010-13 but the French manufacturer has been lagging behind champions Mercedes and Ferrari since the complex new V6 turbo hybrid power units were introduced in 2014. Like Renault, Honda has also struggled this year.

Relations between Red Bull and Renault have been prickly all year but Ricciardo, 26, was diplomatic when asked about the Renault engines this season. He said he was still unsure what would happen but was looking forward to driving a more competitive car next year. "We expected this year to be better, obviously not only from performance but also reliability," he said. "This year was more challenging than we hoped but you just hope, moving forward, whatever happens in '16 that we don't struggle as much as we did this year."

Despite his frustrations, the Australian was at least hopeful for a better showing at this weekend's Singapore Grand Prix. The slow, tight street circuit should suit Red Bull and while Ricciardo was unsure if they could keep up with the dominant Mercedes', he did expect to challenge Ferrari for a spot on the podium. "This is definitely one that should suit us a lot better, it's just maxed out for us, it's what we're normally better at," he said.

"I still think Ferrari is going to be strong and hard to beat for us but we should be close. "If we start on the right foot, I think we'll be there." — Reuters