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Puzzled faces at race

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WHAT should have been an exciting time for 72 racing teams at the Proton International 300km Merdeka Race turned out to be a big puzzle in the end.

Many drivers competing in the third edition of the race at the Sepang F1 Circuit yesterday were wondering what went wrong - was it just a technical fault or someone had fouled up.

The organisers announced Eric Yeo and Raymond Tan of team Hi-Rev Racing as the winners of the 55-lap race but the computer screens carrying the race updates showed they had actually finished sixth!

This angered Krishna Shanmugam who, according to the computer updates, had lead the race from the 40th lap and finished first. The computer updates enabled officials and spectators to follow the race as each lap passes. Big display poles are located at several points to help spectators monitor the leading driver's position.

Krishna, the second driver for team ASG, told newsmen after the race that no-one overtook him and the updates showed that the Hi-Rev team were not only sixth but lagged three laps behind his car.

A frustrated Krishna said: "How can this be? There's a foul-up in the results. In fact I talked to some race officials and they admitted there was a computer crash. So how could they go on declaring Yeo and Tan as the winners?"

Several other disgruntled racers and team members also approached race officials and journalists demanding to be heard.

Yap Kam Hoong of team Tan Meng Lai who, according to the updates, was runner-up one lap behind Krishna was screaming his lungs out, protesting for a review.

There was a commotion as several other racers also came out with their own complaints, amidst unhappy faces of team supporters.

Later, it was learnt that even the computer updates could not be relied on.

The combination of angry protests and puzzled looks on the organisers part forced them to defer announcing the official results until today.

Said clerk-of-course Jeff Amin: "There was a hiccup between the scoreboard and the timing equipment. So no official results will be released today (yesterday)."

He said the teams would be assembled at the circuit at 10am today where their cars would be scrutinised for illegal modifications.

"Then we will get to the heart of the matter and find out who are the true winners," Jeff told reporters.

Hints of the information hiccup actually started earlier with the superbike, superkart, Proton Satria GTi and Proton Putra celebrity races, which took place in the morning.

Protests from races forced the organisers to come up with the amended results in the afternoon with the Satria GTi race which only had four competitors, determined only at 5pm.

At the paddocks, racing team members were confused to see their lap count did not tally with those shown on the scoreboard.

Some 20,000 spectators had gathered at the world-class track to enjoy the third instalment of the race.

Several thousands more watched the race from vantage points outside the circuit.

For those who came into the circuit, it was certainly a fun-filled day

as they were treated to the best racing talents in the country who were gunning for the Prime Minister's Challenge Trophy.

By far the biggest group at the circuit, were supporters of Team Genesis World Racing, the defending champions of the Proton Merdeka Race.

Among the 146 drivers competing in the endurance race was Datuk Azhar Mansor, who teamed up with his brother, Azmi, in Team Walls-USPD Proton Putra.

Before the flag-off, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad led the racers in the warm-up lap in a Proton Cabriolet prototype.

For the spectators, the main race was not the only attraction, as a full-blown carnival consisting of fun activities, stage performances, exhibitions and contests were held during the two-day event.

As their parents waited for the race, the children were treated to various events where they won attractive prizes for their participation.

There were also Disney mascots, jugglers, stiltwalkers, illusionists to entertain them.

Apart from the main race, there were also the Proton GTi race, a superbike race, Catamaran F150 Superkart race and the Proton Putra Celebrity.

In the Celebrity Race, singer-actor Abdul Razak Ahmad stood off a challenge from Hans Isaac, to claim the top spot in the five-lap race. Third place went to newscaster Nurul Alis Kiki.

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