

Nine top donors go for a spin with Dr M

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SEPANG: Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has probably met many brave men in his long career as the country's leader.

However, the nine men who stepped forward to bid for a "taxi ride" with him at the Sepang International Circuit (SIC) here yesterday were probably the bravest.

"I gave them no assurance that they would be safe with me. After all, I am already old. My hands shake and my eyes are not as good as before," he said.

"But they are willing to take the risk. And - *alhamdulillah* (thank God) - they are all safe."

Dr Mahathir chauffeured the top donors for a rare track experience around the 5.5km Formula One Circuit in a Porsche Cayenne - a privilege

for which some corporate leaders bid as high as RM50,000 per lap.

Total donations from this event alone topped RM200,000, which was in aid of tsunami survivors.

Asked if it was true that some of the passengers had said he was driving up to 200kph on the track, Dr Mahathir said he wanted to overtake the Ferrari in front of him.

"I was trying to overtake but the Cayenne was not as fast as the Ferrari," he added.

One privileged passenger, Malaysian Maritime and Dredging Corporation executive chairman Iskandar Hussin, said Dr Mahathir was a "fast but careful driver."

"He took some corners at 120kph. We were rather quiet in the car with him, so much so that at one point, he asked us

whether we were scared. But then he laughed it off."

Naza Group chairman Tan Sri S.M. Nasimuddin said Dr Mahathir was a "confident driver".

After receiving a donation of about RM600,000 from the "Racers United in aid of Tsunami Fund", Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said programmes aimed at promoting Malaysia's holiday destinations and world-class events such as the Formula One races in March would go on.

"We want to tell tourists that there is no need to worry and that they are safe in Malaysia," he said.

Earlier, SIC chairman Datuk Mokhzani Tun Mahathir said the F1 races and other tourism promotion events should continue if Malaysia was to remain competitive in the industry.