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Dr Mahathir drives in with RM607,671

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - The Malaysian Tsunami Disaster Fund turned to the Sepang International Circuit for the bulk of today's collection, bringing in RM607,671.77.

The money came from various fund-raising activities, including businessmen who bid top dollar to be chauffeured by former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad around the racing circuit.

Today's donations pushed the fund to RM37.38 million.

At the wheel of a Porsche Cayenne SUV, Dr Mahathir took the winning bidders around the 5.543km race track, occasionally at hair-raising speeds.

The top bidder was Datuk Dr John Tan, executive chairman of Dceil International Bhd, who gave a total of RM100,000, half of it as a personal donation.

"He's 79 but he drives like a youngster," Tan said after his ride. "He was very good at handling corners. He was breaking and accelerating appropriately."

Another businessman who went for the privileged ride was Naza Group executive chairman Tan Sri S.M. Nasimuddin S.M. Amin, who also donated RM50,000, which raised his total contributions to RM2 million.

Seven other unidentified bidders also went for the ride with Dr Mahathir.

The others who simply donated to the fund were BSA Racing Team principal Datuk Dr Cam Soh (RM30,000), Datuk Tee Thian Lee (RM20,000), Datuk H.K. Leong (RM20,000) and Datuk Vincent Lye (RM10,000).

Before each ride, Dr Mahathir cautioned the privileged passengers that "I am not as sharp as I used to be".

"My hands shake and my eyesight is weak," he said. "So if they wanted to ride with me, I welcome them. They were willing to take the risk and ride with me but I drove slowly. I'm grateful for the donations."

A carnival atmosphere pervaded the circuit.

Later, at a presentation ceremony, other donors, through Dr Mahathir, presented their cheques to Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

They included Sapura Group president and chief executive officer Datuk Shahril Shamsudin (RM100,000), H2O managing director Datuk Yahya Jalil (RM100,000), Sepang International Circuit (RM50,151,77), HL Engineering (RM50,000), Malaysia Maritime and Dredging Corporation Sdn Bhd (RM50,000), Porsche Club (RM10,000), and the Ferrari Owners Club (RM10,000).

Over RM100 million worth of cars assembled at the circuit, including a Ferrari and a Lamborghini Murcielago owned by racing driver J.P. Chin.

Symphony Global Technologies group chief executive Datuk Azman Yahya paraded his collection of sports cars. .

Earlier, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi accepted a RM10,000 cheque from the Indian Progressive Front, presented by its president, Datuk M.G. Pandithan.

In Sungai Buloh, the Bukit Rahman Putra 5 Residents' Association donated RM19,100. Its chairman, Zainal Abidin Mohd Noor, presented the cheque to Paya Jaras state assemblyman Muhammad Pushro Mat Johor. At Balai Berita, Taman Wahyu 1 Residents' Association donated RM1,222.50.

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