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Berjaya pledges RM250,000

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The Berjaya Group of Companies gave the Malaysian International Peace Fund a major boost by pledging RM250,000 to Sports Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein today.

Announcing the contribution, Hishammuddin said though the pledge was made today, April Fools Day, Berjaya Sports Toto Berhad chairman and chief executive officer Tan Sri Vincent Tan assured him it was no joke.

"It is the biggest single contribution from the private sector to date, said Hishammuddin after presenting the Timesport-Sports Toto 2002 Man of the Year Award to rally driver Karamjit Singh at the Bukit Kiara Equestrian Club in Bukit Kiara.

"I hope other companies will follow suit.

"I would like to assure all concerned that there will be transparency and accountability in the management and disbursement of the funds.

"The fund is an initiative of the media, and it is heartening to note that at such an early stage we have received so much support.

"We will also collect funds during Umno Youth general assembly which, hopefully, will be held this month."

Mercy (Malaysian Medical Relief Society) will lead the NGOs in providing medical relief from Malaysia while the Malaysian Red Crescent Society will look into providing humanitarian aid.

According to Hishammuddin, the fund is a good way to make known Malaysia's anger and objection towards the war on Iraq, and urged more individuals and corporate bodies to donate generously.

"All the money collected, including the RM10 million pledged by the Malaysian Government, will be sent to Iraq through Wisma Putra."

The National Unity and Social Development Ministry will also embark on a two-month nationwide campaign to raise money.

Minister Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman said all welfare organisations under her ministry and NGOs would be mobilised to collect money for the campaign from today.

The organisations could raise funds through the activities planned by the ministry or they could organise their own fundraising activities.

"We will hand over the collection to the Foreign Ministry to be forwarded to the Iraqi authorities," she said after chairing a meeting with representatives from 18 organisations at her ministry here today.

Selangor Menteri Besar and MYC chairman Datuk Dr Mohamad Khir Toyo announced a nationwide collection programme to be made through the MYC branches and targeted RM250,000 for the Fund.

The donations are expected to be handed over to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on National Youth Day at Bukit Jalil on May 15.

The MYC will also launch a Youth Run on May 4 at Dataran Merdeka and the proceeds will be channelled to the fund.

He said the MYC was against the war as it was killing more civilians than soldiers.

"We are also saddened by reports that US may attack Iran and Syria," he said.

He said the MYC would be sending three representatives to Iran tomorrow on a fact-finding mission and also a team of medical personnel and MYC representatives to Iraq, pending approval from Wisma Putra, to assist teams from other organisations participating in relief efforts there.

The Gerakan Youth today contributed RM1,000 towards the Fund.

Youth leader Mah Siew Keong said the contribution, though small, reflected the movement's commitment to the Iraqi people.

"We have been active in peace rallies because we are saddened to see the suffering of innocent Iraqi civilians in this unjust war.

He said this after handing over the donation to New Straits Times administration manager Ibrahim Mohd Tamari at Balai Berita today.

Gerakan Youth was represented by Mah, deputy chairman Lee Kah Choon, vice-chairman A. Kohilan Pillay and deputy treasurer Lau Yeng Peng.

In Seremban, Gagasan Belia Ampangan, which had earlier donated RM3,000 to the Fund, donated another RM430 today.

Led by its chairman Mahmud Riadzi Hashim, the body which comprises professionals, passed the hat around during its community programme held recently.

The RM430 was collected from participants who attended the organisation's "Meeting of intellectuals and the society" held at Maktab Perguruan Raja Melewar near here.

In Ipoh, the Perak Fisheries Department Sports Club contributed RM439.50.

The donation was collected at its 15th annual general meeting at the Fisheries Department's office here yesterday.

The money was handed over by its outgoing director Md Shah Abdul Hamid, who is club patron, to NST bureau chief Manan Osman.

"The contribution is our way of showing that we care and sympathise with the Iraqi people," said Shah.

The Malaysian International Peace Fund stands at RM45,623.