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Shahrizan on the comeback trail

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A slight drizzle was braved by 318 cyclists in a fitting tribute to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad in the 30-kilometre uphill Genting Challenge in Genting Highlands yesterday.

And on a day the country looked back at the 22-year struggle Dr. Mahathir went through to elevate the country's status, Shahrizan Selamat signalled his return to prominence by winning the event with a time of one hour 25 minutes 25.30s.

"I was out injured since February and only started an intensive training programme recently. I would like to think that I am in with a fighting chance to make the Sea Games squad with this performance," said Shahrizan.

Shahrizan, 20, who was dropped from the national team after burning out during the Le Tour de Langkawi (LTdL) in January, was followed by emerging 18-year old Malacca cyclist Ng Yong Lee, who registered 1'28:10.88s.

National cyclist Wong Ah Thiam was third with a time of 1'39:42.19s, Yusof Nasir fourth on 1'39:42.91s and Sea Games-bound Shahrulneeza Razali fifth with a time of 1'41:22.04s.

The event also saw a good mixture of veteran and young cyclists taking up the challenge, namely national coach Ng Joo Ngan, who finished in the third hour and youngest competitor, 11-year old Salak Tinggi Primary School student Nur Anis Amanina Roslan, who did well to finish in the fourth hour.

It was also a special occasion for national cyclist Musairi Musa, who fought of pain from injuries sustained in a heavy crash during the recent Tour de Malaysia to finish 13th on his 31st birthday.

The event also marked the presentation of the International Cycling Union (UCI) Merit to Dr. Mahathir, which was approved at the UCI management board on Oct 9. UCI management board member Datuk Seri Darshan Singh Gill made the announcement.

Dr. Mahathir is the first head of State to be honoured with the UCI Merit, the UCI's highest award for his contributions and support for the development and growth of cycling.

The top 22 finishers will accompany Darshan to present Dr. Mahathir with the UCI Merit during the Malaysian National Cycling Federation's (MNCF) 50th anniversary dinner, which is to be held at a date set by the Prime Minister's department.

The top 22 finishers were: 1 Shahrizan, 2 Ng, 3 Wong, 4 Yusof, 5 Shahrulneeza, 6 Mohamed Azrul Hafiz, 7 Mahadzir Hamad, 8 Jasmin Ruslan, 9 Ahmad Falani, 10 Amir Mustafa Rosli, 11 Sayuti Zahid, 12 Abdul Hakim Mohamed, 13 Musairi Musa, 14 Rizal Ramle, 15 Gary Chong, 16 Nur Umadi Rosdi, 17 Razif Salleh, 18 Fahmi Tajuddin, 19 Mohamed Arifin, 20 Lee Lip Fong, 21 Amirudin Jamaludin, 22 Mohamed Arif Shukri.