

1Malaysia NGO gives RM2mil to journo, welfare groups

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By Susan Loone

Three journalists' organisations received RM50,000 each while 103 NGOs got between RM5,000 and RM50,000 at a dinner attended by party boy and billionaire Low Taek Jho, widely known as Jho Low.

A total of RM2.2 million in donations were given out to the groups last night by pro-BN 1Malaysia-Penang Welfare Club.

About 5,000 people attended the sit-down dinner, organised by the Zhou Jia Quan Martial Arts Association at the Han Chiang College field.

Among the VIPs were the association president and Komtar BN coordinator Loh Chye Teik, flamboyant young tycoon Low, and 1Malaysia-Penang Welfare Club president Geh Choh Hun.

Zhou Jia Quan and three media associations - Penang Press Club, Penang Journalists and Photographers Association (Pewaju) and Journalists Union of North Malaya - received RM50,000 each.

Two NGOs received RM20,000 and the rest, RM5,000 each.

While the NGOs - most of which are associations for martial arts, football, welfare, special education, and the infirmed and aged - were handed their cheques, the 1Malaysia theme song was played softly in the background.

The little known 1Malaysia-Penang Welfare Club has emerged recently to organise a free dinner in the Bagan parliamentary constituency on mainland Penang for potential BN candidate Tay Lay Cheng.

Asked if he was one of the donors, Low said "No" and added when asked about his presence, "I am only a guest at this event."

He was also pressed on reports of his sponsorship of a major concert in Penang on April 20 which will feature Canadian teen sensation Justin Bieber and other big names, but Low declined to comment.

Lifelong partnership

Geh, in his speech to kick off the dinner, told the NGOs that his club intends to have a long-lasting partnership with them.

"There are greater things to come; this is a lifelong relationship. We hope you feel the

same. We will grow together and your contributions will also grow," he said.

Geh then called on the crowd to support the "journey of 1Malaysia", urging everyone to reject those who try to divide the people.

"We must reject those who divide us and bring us pain and suffering. It is very disturbing and unacceptable. There was a welfare event where someone tried to take the credit and tarnish our name," he said.

"We hope that, if you see such things, you will report such defamatory actions to us."

Later, speaking to reporters, Geh said his club started operating last June and will hold a press conference to provide more information.

Geh stressed that the donors for the event "came from all over the country".

Asked if Jho Low is among the donors of the RM2.2 million welfare aid, Geh said: "I do not want to comment. We will explain more at our press briefing next week."

Those at Jho Low's table pressed him to make a speech as well, but he declined.

Jho Low, 30, who is known to be a big spender and often hobnobs with international celebrities, attended the function wearing the blue 1Malaysia T-shirt.

By about 10.30pm, a quarter of the crowd had left, leaving many tables empty.

Pewaju: Aid is unconditional

It is learnt that several journalists were taken aback by the donations to the press associations.

Pewaju president Kelvin Chua said his association received the money from the 1Malaysia Club to set up an education fund.

"We received the money and while we are answerable and responsible to our members, the money will not influence the way our members report news, nor who our members wish to support," Chua told Malaysiakini.

"There is no conflict of interest. Many, including property developers, will be donating to us. So we welcome donations as long as these are unconditional."

