Threat of Le Tour curtain raiser

Cycling event in Putrajaya attracts 2,000 participants

By NG WEI LOON

Cycling enthusiasts felt the pulse and shared the excitement of the 13th edition of the Le Tour de Langkawi (13L) at the Kayangan T emb 8 held in front of the Palace of Justice in Putrajaya on Sunday. Those who showed up at the Tour’s curtain raiser sponsored by the Amanah Raya Berhad saw the bare shoulders with Metan Hompo - GOK team trio of Koji Fukushima and his brother Shinichi Fukushima along with Malaysia’s Ng Yong Li. Ng is the sole non-Japanese in the line-up of the six-rider team. Another three riders for the side are Yukyka Azahari, Takashi Miya-zawa and Miyuki Shinmoto. The 34-year-old Koji said he was pleased to be back here to compete in the Tour. He waved his fans with his friendly gestures as well as in his attempts to converse in Malay with the locals. Besides giving away postcards with his image on it, Koji also obliged in signing autographs and posing for photos.

This season, the Tour drew a record turnout of 25 teams comprising professional tour, professional continental and Asian sides. They will vie for honours in the nine-stage Tour travelling a total distance of 1377 km from Feb 8 to 17. “I am really happy to be here. For the upcoming Tour, teamwork is crucial to ensure that our team win at least a stage victory. We will keep on attacking to get on the podium,” added Koji, who is renowned for his unorthodox style of riding. The event also goes on to support various causes, with some of the funds raised going to various charities.

About 2,000 participants took part in the fun ride. Federal Territories Minister Datuk Seri Zulhaman Ramban, Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said, Tourism Minister Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor and Putrajaya Corporation presidentTan Sri Samsudin Osman also graced the event. Prior to the ride, the organisers also gave away bicycles to the less privileged. In addition, sponsors for the Tour also stepped forward to reinforce their commitments and presented their contributions to Azalina. At the starting line, the solar bicycle from Universiti Tenaga National pedalled by Omar Mirajdrew huge attention. Omar said he covered a total distance of 2,500km over five days at the World Solar Cycle Challenge held in Australia in 2005. The dignitaries also joined representatives from corporate companies, NGOs, tourists and students in the brief km ride while the avid cyclists went on the 40km route. Zulhaman’s wife Datuk Seri Siti Noriah Ani Abdul Razak flagged off the participants. Former cycling icon Shahanudin Jafar, two-time Olympic (1964 Tokyo and 1968 Mexico) Ng Joo Pong and former national women’s cyclist Dihuan Musahal also came out to show their support.

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