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**Going around the circuit:** Azalina (centre) joining the participants in the fun ride.



**Switching gear:** Koji checking out Omar's (in blue) solar cycle while his brother Shinichi looks on.

# Thrill of Le Tour curtain raiser

**Cycling event in Putrajaya attracts 2,000 participants**

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**C**YCLING enthusiasts felt the pulse and shared excitement of the 13th edition of the Le Tour de Langkawi (LTdL) at the Kayuhan LTdL08 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 savoured the rare privilege to rub shoulders with Meitan Hompo - GDR 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 Yukiya Arashiro, Takashi Miya-zawa and Miyataka Shimizu.

The 34-year-old Koji said he was pleased to be back here to compete in the Tour.

He wooed his fans with his friendly gestures as well as his attempts to converse in Malay with the locals.

Besides giving away postcards with his image on it, Koji also obliged in



**Off they go:** The cyclists pedalling around the 1km fun ride route.



**Safety first:** UPM student Faizah Ahmad (right) helping her university mate Siti Sarah A. Talib to adjust her helmet.

signing autographs and posing for photos.

This season, the Tour drew a record turnout of 25 teams comprising professional tour, professional continental, continental and Asian sides.

They will vie for honours in the nine-stage Tour travelling a total distance of 1377.4km from Feb 9 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 harmonica blowing antics on the saddle.

About 2,000 participants took part in the fun ride.

Federal Territories Minister Datuk Seri Zulhasnan Rafique, Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said, Tourism Minister Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor and Putrajaya Corporation president Tan 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 Sirat drew 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 2006.

The dignitaries also joined representatives from corporate companies, NGOs, tourists and students in the brief 1km ride while the avid cyclists went on the 40km route.

Zulhasnan's wife Datin Seri Siti Nooriah Ana Abdul Razak flagged off the participants.

Former cycling icon Shaharudin Jaffar, two-time Olympian (1964

Tokyo and 1968 Mexico) Ng Joo Pong and former national women's cyclist Diljan Mushalkhan were also part of the Pedal Power Cycling Group from Shah Alam.

"For the young cyclists, the event was a refreshing change from their weekly training routine. It was an opportunity for them to feel the different environment cycling here in Putrajaya. Usually, we train at the Taman Tasik Shah Alam," said Shaharudin.

In addition, the Kolej Sultan Alaeddin Sulaiman Shah residents from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) also featured in the ride.

UPM corporate communications officer Kamarol Abu Bakar said they encouraged their students to cycle as part of their environment friendly initiative.

"A total of 19 of them signed up for the ride. They usually commute around the campus on their bicycles," he added.