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Market (News Focus)

ALOR SETAR'S TRADITIONAL MARKET CONTINUES TO DRAW CROWDS

By: Mohamad Bakri Darus

ALOR SETAR, Jan 10 (Bernama) -- Despite the existence of modern supermarkets in this town, the traditional market or "Pekan Rabu" continues to attract both the local population as well as visitors from other states.

It is only there that one can obtain a wide variety of traditional foods -- salted fruit, spices, pickled ikan puyu, lampam, bahulu, dodol and karas.

Also sold in the market are traditional goods made of gold, silver and copper and embroidered cloth, batik, bags, wedding outfits, prayer goods including those needed for performing the Haj, traditional medicine and handicraft made of rattan, bamboo and pine leaves.

Just like the Payang market in Kuala Terengganu and Chowrasta market in Pulau Pinang, Pekan Rabu is closely identified with Alor Setar, and a visit to the town is incomplete without setting foot in the traditional market.

Consisting of thatch roofed-stalls when they were set up in 1932, Pekan Rabu is now an attractive two-storey complex in Jalan Tunku Ibrahim in the town centre.

The complex, occupied by 265 Malay traders, was built in 1978 and opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Since November 1994, it has undergone renovation at the urgings of Dr Mahathir who in his youth had traded in the market.

During a one-day visit to Kedah last Monday, Dr Mahathir spent about an hour looking at the results of the RM5.8 million renovation which was just completed.

The traders who have been operating from temporary sites at the nearby car park and along Lorong Pekan Rabu since late 1994, are expected to be all back in the complex by the middle of this month. So far, 30 stalls have already moved.

Despite moving to the complex and the renovation, Pekan Rabu's traditional character still remains.

But the question is to what extent would the renovation affect the trading style of the entrepreneurs.

Is it a case of just a change in the makeup of the building with the traders keeping to their old ways? Or do the traders want to be seen as a model for other petty traders in Kedah?

Menteri Besar Tan Sri Haji Osman Aroff said some time back that the traders in Pekan Rabu should be sent for courses and taken for a visit to some of the leading supermarkets in the country to observe more closely how the businesses are managed.

It is hoped that through the courses and visit, they become better traders.

Kedah Malay Chamber of Commerce president Baharudin Kasim said Pekan Rabu traders could become a model for other petty traders if they displayed high business management ability.

He said a special committee comprising not only of these traders but also others in the corporate sector must be set up to ensure that the Pekan Rabu complex remains a leading shopping area. -- BERNAMA