

25/11/1997

A boost for Malay theatre

Arfah Abdullah

MALAY theatre is receiving the desired attention and support from the corporate world, starting with the sponsorship of the children's musical Taman Baginda.

FACB Bhd subsidiary Nexus Golf Resort Karambunai, and Kretam Holdings Berhad have each pledged RM100,000; and organisers Utusan Malaysia and the New Straits Times are contributing RM25,000 each towards the production.

"We feel that it is important for the corporate world to contribute towards the arts," said Utusan Group executive chairman and joint adviser of the production Tan Sri Kamarul Ariffin.

"If local productions are not supported by the locals, then how else are we going to showcase our culture?" said Kamarul at the cheque presentation ceremony held at Utusan's head office last week.

"We have to give an opportunity to local works, so that we are not only exposed to foreign culture. This goes for film and literature as well," he said.

Besides Kamarul, the other joint advisers are the president and CEO of FACB group of companies Tan Sri Chen Lip Keong and vice chairman and CEO of Kretam Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

Joint chairmen of the production will be Utusan group editor Datuk Johan Jaafar and NST group editor Datuk Abdul Kadir Jasin.

Kamarul said that Malaysia has not really focused on the development of the arts since its Independence in 1957.

"The arts have been neglected for too long. If we focus on the development of the economy without placing due emphasis on the development of the arts, we will lose out in the end," he said.

"Plans for the Panggung Negara first surfaced in 1971 but it was not financially viable then. Now with financial backing and support from our Prime Minister, the Panggung is due to be completed and utilised next year."

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is the patron of Taman Baginda, which will be showing at MATIC, Jalan Ampang, Kuala Lumpur from Dec 12 to 17.

Utusan has organised and sponsored a few productions over the last two years, namely the staging of Tan Sri A. Samad Said's Lantai T. Pinkie last year and their oft-held Malam Puisi.

"We don't only want to build the Panggung, but we also want to fill it. If we do not find support locally, where else can we find it?" said Kamarul.

"We have to see how we can contribute to the development of the arts in theatre and drama. I hope more people will come forward and contribute towards the arts," he said.

Datuk Johan Jaafar, who in his younger days was quite involved in the theatre scene, feels that helping to bring in a "new breed" of audience is the significant part of sponsoring Malay theatre productions.

"As more such productions are staged, "we will see this new breed of audience emerging - those who have never been to see Malay theatre, those who are used to seeing English productions and even student actors," said Johan.

"I was active in theatre before, and it was very difficult to get sponsorships. Now it is relatively easier, but we still have to join forces and work harder at obtaining sponsors."

Johan also said that Utusan is more concerned about Malay productions because English theatre groups have better financial support.

"The problem with Malay theatre groups is that there are a lot of small groups out there who are not quite well organised.

"We want to help them in terms of management skills, find sponsorship and also to give publicity. We can also help in identifying talents and potential groups which we can sponsor.

"Of course, we want to encourage quality productions, so in one year, we will probably identify one or two theatre groups."

Taman Baginda is a story of computer-savvy Inda, a 12-year-old boy, who while creating computer game Taman Baginda, gets caught in cyber-mystical confusion and ends up living an imaginary life through the programme.

The musical has a cast of 50 children aged seven to 15 from Tunas Budaya, of the Federal Territory Department of Culture and Arts. It is directed by Zaifri Husin.

Tickets are available from tomorrow at MATIC (03-2648337/2648343/2643929) and at Utusan Malaysia head office, Jalan Lima through Jalan Chan Sow Lin, Sungai Besi, Kuala Lumpur at (03-2217055/217171/2217183).

(END)