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## Pahang's entry bags top prize in Floral Parade

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Keeping to a strict budget did not harm Pahang's entry to the Floral Parade, rather its colourful float drove away with the top award, the Premier Trophy today.

It was eighth-time lucky for Pahang which diligently sent an entry every year since 1991. The economic problems this year forced a budget cut but imagination and creativity won the day.

The float was entered by the Fraser's Hill Development Corporation. Themed "Neverending Heritage", the animated float featured the richness of Pahang's culture and natural heritage. A jungle fowl which fluttered its eyelids sat in front while a giant congkak board formed the body of the float.

On it were two men demonstrating the traditional art of top spinning, one being the pemangkah (who places the top) and the other the penyambut (who receives the top).

An added bonus came in the form of popular artiste Erra Fazira, who balanced high on the float, teasingly throwing roses to the crowd.

Pahang State Culture, Arts and Tourism Committee chairman Datuk Shahiruddin Moin said the honour was totally unexpected as the State had entered seven times before without success.

He said the float cost about RM120,000, far less than the usual RM300,000.

The parade was the highlight of the eighth Flora Fest (July 5 to 12) and carries the theme "Games and Pastimes".

It was flagged off at 8am by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, but long before that, the crowd had gathered at Dataran Merdeka in an attempt to secure good vantage points.

The initial cloudy skies were kind to the delicate flowers, but a blazing sun emerged midway through the two-hour parade.

Besides the 10 floats including Tourism Malaysia's non-competing one, there were marching bands, a vintage car parade and cultural performances. The rousing rattle of brass band drums added to the lively atmosphere.

The prizes were given away by Dr Mahathir.

The Theme Trophy went to Kuala Lumpur City Hall's "A Quantum Leap into the Next Millennium" float which depicted the quest for cyber-nation status.

The Creative Trophy was won by Penang State's Sukom-inspired entry which featured mascot Wira boxing with a lion (symbolising Britain).

The Parade Special Trophy was awarded to Malaysia Airlines for its "Surfing the Internet with Mat Cyber" entry, while the Jury's Special Award went to the Shah Alam Municipal Council for its "Healthy Lifestyle" float.

Consolation prize winners were the Kuala Lumpur Tourist Association, KFC Holdings (M) Bhd, and Johor and Negri Sembilan State Governments.

Speaking to reporters later, Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik said this year's parade was bigger than last year's which had only six floats.

Asked if the parade was appropriate in an economic downturn, he said the downturn made it imperative to hold more tourism promotions.

"It's one way for us to overcome the economic problems. Tourism is an important revenue-earner," he said.

He said revenue was expected to increase from the RM10.5 billion earned

last year, and arrivals expected to rise to 6.8 million from 6.2 million.

Tourists in the crowd enjoyed the parade. Carmel Little, 24, from Ireland and Robyn Day, 24, from New Zealand, said they heard about the parade yesterday.

"It was brilliant and beautiful. It was nice to see how other countries hold their parades. I liked the relaxed atmosphere, no shoving and pushing. I also saw your Prime Minister!" said Little.

Polish tourist John Vilopotowski, who was in Malaysia with his family, said the floats were beautiful. He learned about the fest from television.

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