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Opening of national theatre set to revive arts scene

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The curtains officially go up at Istana Budaya tomorrow, setting the stage for local and international talents to breathe new life into the country's arts scene.

The state-of-the-art national theatre will be opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in a ceremony that will be telecast "live" over TV1.

Istana Budaya officials have said that they will make full use of the theatre's special effects to make the ceremony a memorable one.

One official hinted that the evening's highlight would be Dr Mahathir's "now you see him, now you don't" act which will be staged with the help of special effects as the Prime Minister enters the theatre.

A full house is expected with invited guests filling the 1,469-seat theatre for the evening's entertainment, Keris Sang Puteri, the most ambitious Malaysian musical ever to be staged.

With actress Vanidah Imran in the lead role, the two-hour musical will take audiences back through history to a time when Malay and Bugis warriors were united under one banner to battle the Dutch.

The RM500,000 musical, considered the first all-Malaysian theatre production, is helmed by top theatrical talents in the country, including Datuk Rahim Razali as director for the cast of 65.

Tickets for the Keris Sang Puteri musical, which will run until Saturday, are priced at RM20 and RM30 but students pay only RM10.

The audience will be treated to breathtaking sets which will be set up on all of the theatre's four stages, which can be manoeuvred behind the scenes so that new scenes can be moved in front of the audience in just seconds.

Each stage measures 28m by 25m and can be moved at a maximum speed of 1.5m a second, allowing for a seamless change of sets without interrupting the flow of the play.

The theatre's marketing manager, Ramlah Amir, said Malaysians could look forward to a variety of performances in the coming months.

Another musical entitled Rubiah is set to take the stage after Keris Sang Puteri ends its run.

Singer Fauziah Latiff will make her stage debut in the lead role as a woman who is close to God and struggles to find a place for human relationships in her life.

Other productions in the works include a performance of traditional dances from Asean, a contemporary ballet performance from an Italian troupe, a solo performance by Italian violinist Uto Ughui and a joint show by the National Symphony Orchestra and national choir.

There are also arrangements for the British Council to stage an adaptation of Jane Eyre, a performance by French pianist Cedric Tiberghien and a show by the Orkestra Vienna Volksopen from Austria.

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