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Raya in spirit of unity (HL)

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Malaysians of all races and religions celebrated Hari Raya Aidilfitri today in the spirit of unity by visiting the homes of friends and the country's leaders.

Muslims celebrated the day with joy by throwing open their homes while other Malaysians spent the day visiting friends.

Topping the open house list was the Prime Minister's at Seri Perdana in Putrajaya which was thronged with more than 50,000 people - the biggest ever.

It was the first time Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali held their open house at Putrajaya.

As is the tradition, Muslims nationwide opened the day with morning prayers at mosques.

At Masjid Negara, the Prime Minister accompanied Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah and Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Siti Aishah for prayers.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was also present. They later shook hands with well-wishers.

At Istana Negara later, the King received dignitaries, including Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah, Abdullah and his wife Datin Seri Endon Mahmood and diplomats.

The Prime Minister then headed for Seri Perdana to hold his open house.

There was an air of festivity at Putrajaya despite the clogged roads as cars crawled along. Many parked their cars a long distance away and walked in the blazing heat to the beautiful residence on the hill.

As this was the first time the new Seri Perdana was opened to the public, the people took the opportunity to explore the house and grounds. For many, this was also their first visit to Putrajaya and they came armed with cameras.

It was a constant stream of people to Seri Perdana, so much so that the Prime Minister could not take a two-hour break as originally planned.

He only took a 15-minute break, part of which was used for a brief Press conference.

Even then, Dr Siti Hasmah had to gently interrupt to say that the people had become restless and asked the reporters to excuse her husband.

Abdullah's open house at the Putra World Trade Centre also saw a good crowd which poured in relentlessly to greet him and Endon before sampling Raya fare like lemang, ketupat and rendang.

This scene was repeated nationwide at the homes of the country's leaders, including Menteri Besar, Chief Ministers and Ministers.

Opposition leaders also welcomed many well-wishers to their homes.

Keadilan president Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail received guests at her house in Damansara Heights in Kuala Lumpur.

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