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Seri Perdana enthrals visitors

Carolyn Hong

SERI Perdana, the new official residence of the Prime Minister, is in out-of-the-way Putrajaya but that didn't stop more than 50,000 people from visiting Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad there yesterday.

They were there to join Dr Mahathir and his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali in celebrating Hari Raya Aidilfitri for the first time at Putrajaya, the new Federal administrative capital about 40 kilometres from Kuala Lumpur.

A long line of people had formed very early, moving slowly up the hill to the residence with its distinctive green roof topped with a dome. White tents provided shade from the relentless sun.

Many waited for over an hour, inching forward until they reached the front doors which opened into a white hall, a gift gallery and an elegant curved stairway with iron railings.

Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah waited at the top of the stairs to greet their guests and to pose for pictures.

Malaysians of all races and ages came in a never-ending stream, the children beaming as duit raya was pressed into their hands.

The people filed past into the public wing of the residence where several rooms were opened for viewing for the first time. They were unanimous in their admiration of the sprawling residence and its manicured grounds.

The first room they passed through was the banquet hall dominated by a J-shaped polished brown table and rows of dusky pink floral chairs.

The next room was an elegant, pale blue drawing room for receiving guests, and the third room was a pastel green surau.

They then filed onto a balcony with a view of the majestic mosque with its soaring pink dome and the Prime Minister's Department across the lake.

A stairway led the way down into the landscaped grounds.

"It's grand and beautiful. It's world-class befitting our leader," said Chong Chee Hian, from Kuching but now working in Kuala Lumpur.

He was with his wife Jane and son Sam, father Chong Kian Foh, mother Leong Yun Fah and uncle Bong Kim Boon. His parents live in Kuching and made the trip to Putrajaya to round off their visit to the capital.

They also wanted to visit the Prime Minister and his wife as they did last year at the old Seri Perdana.

For the Sanglimuthu family, this was the eighth time they had visited the Prime Minister during Hari Raya. R. Sanglimuthu, a manager, said they admired Dr Mahathir and felt lucky to live in Malaysia. He came with his wife V.S. Valarmathi, daughters Malini and Darshini, son Pirthivin and mother P. Pappathy.

Kapt (R) Ahmad Yusof also brought his whole family along for a visit before they journeyed home to join the rest of the family in Alor Star.

"It's very beautiful. It's wonderful for Malaysia to have something like this," he said, adding that he didn't want to miss greeting the Prime Minister. His wife Siti Saharun, sons Asri, Ashan and Aslaf, and daughters Ashani and Asnida were with him.

For Australians Nicholas, Linda and their daughter Cheryl Anne Iverson, they made the trip as the girl wanted to take a picture with Dr Mahathir.

Nicholas, who has an interest in information technology, said he admires Dr Mahathir's vision - the Multimedia Super Corridor and Cyberjaya.

"And this residence is magnificent. Imagine waking up and walking out

onto the balcony every morning," said Linda.

Japanese teacher Yuzura Ide came with friends Kazuko Nakao, Etsuko Ishikawa and Kuniko Morikawa, all clad in baju kurung. Yuzura said she wanted to meet the Prime Minister because she enjoyed living in Malaysia where foreigners felt welcomed and safe.

S. Jayanthi, who came with her husband M. Asogan, daughter Sathia and son Kabilan, said she was surprised at the splendour of Seri Perdana.

"I never thought it would be so nice. It's amazing," she said.

"It's very elegant," said Solahhuddin Hassan who came with his wife Wan Saliza Wan Isa. Their children Nurul Syanimi, Nurul Izzati, Mohd Asraf and Nurul Aisyah were with them.

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