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## Flurry of festivities

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IT is less than two months until the dawn of the new year. Yet, the ever tireless Culture, Arts and Tourism Ministry is busy making sure all preparations for five more major events for this year will be ready as scheduled.

This month, the Ministry will organise two events - the Deepavali Open House and Ramadan Bazaar - while the Megasale Carnival, Hari Raya Open House and Christmas Open House are slated for next month.

Nov 14 has been earmarked for the Deepavali celebration at Laman Bidara of Istana Budaya, Kuala Lumpur, where Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is scheduled to grace the occasion.

"Judging by the good turnout for the last Hari Raya Open House where between 40,000 and 50,000 people came, we hope to get a really good crowd for this event," says Ministry Secretary-General Tengku Datuk Alaudin Tengku Abdul Majid at a media briefing after chairing a meeting with representatives of State Governments.

To signify that Deepavali is indeed the festival of lights, Tengku Alaudin said there will also be a special event on the evening prior to the Hindu festival.

There will be activities like lighting of oil lamps, making "kolam" (a type of graphical design drawn using coloured rice) and cultural performances at the National Art Gallery as well as the Istana Budaya vicinity.

Four days after Deepavali, Ramadan Bazaar will be launched amidst pomp and festivities at Jalan Masjid India, Kuala Lumpur.

Tengku Alaudin says Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is scheduled to launch the month-long activity at 4pm after officiating a world record-breaking porridge cooking session at Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman.

"We hope to set a new record by having 1,422 people cook various types of porridge. The number coincides with the year 1422 in the Muslim calendar," he says.

The organisation of both events, explains Tengku Alaudin, is a continuation of the Ministry's effort to attract more tourists by highlighting the cultural diversity of the Malaysian people.

The premise of "ethnic festivals = national festivals" is also the basis for the planning of the 2002 and 2003 calendars of events.

Further more, all items in the calendar have been agreed upon by State representatives during a Tourism Development National Committee meeting on Aug 21 in Pulau Tioman.

There are eight categories of programmes included in the calendars.

The first is Malaysian festivals where six main festivals of ethnic groups in Malaysia have been turned into national as well as tourism festivals. They are Hari Raya Puasa, Chinese New Year, Deepavali, Christmas, Tadau Kaamatan and Gawai Dayak.

The second is the Malaysian Megasale Carnival held thrice a year - March, August and December - with the aim of promoting Malaysia as a shopping haven.

Next, the Water Festival Month is also included in the calendar. For a whole month each year, holiday packages will emphasise water-based activities and tourist attractions.

The fourth main item in the calendars is the month-long Colours of

Malaysia festivities. True to its tagline of Malaysia Truly Asia, a whole month will be dedicated to showcasing the unique and colourful culture of various ethnic groups in Malaysia.

The Malaysian passion for culinary delights has become the fifth category of tourism product. Indeed, the Food and Fruits Fiesta is a not-to-be-missed event that introduces Malaysian culinary wonders and exotic fruits to visitors.

Unlike most countries, Malaysia takes its independence seriously. Thus National Day is celebrated not just for a day but for a whole month. This celebration has also become an integral part of the tourism calendar.

The seventh main item in the calendar of events is the International Arts Month. This event aims to turn Malaysia into a venue for other countries to showcase their colourful culture and performing arts.

Last but not least, the eighth category is the Ramadan Bazaar where all economic activities conducted during the Muslim fasting month are packaged to instill more understanding about tolerance among the communities in this country.

Interestingly, the Ministry is issuing the calendars early. Tengku Alaudin explains this is necessary to ensure all the relevant quarters will be able to prepare themselves.

"First of all, event managers will be able to plan and implement all activities according to the scheduled programmes," he says.

Then, holiday packages based on the programmes can also be prepared earlier thus making the packaging, promotion and marketing of all the programmes more organised and effective.

Tengku Alaudin adds that all these efforts will result in making the promotion and marketing expenditure more cost effective as well as helping domestic and international tourists plan their holidays in Malaysia better.

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