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Mosque that espouses Muslim unity

ALOR STAR, Wed. - A heartening gesture of the possibilities for Malay unity occurred four days to Aidil Fitri last year.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Opposition leader Datuk Fadzil Noor both attended a breaking of fast ceremony and were photographed shaking hands and exchanging pleasantries.

The venue was the Al-Bukhary mosque here, and the gesture was an apt reflection of the noble intentions of the mosque builders.

Built and funded by the private Al-Bukhary Foundation, which espouses Muslim unity as one of its main objectives, the Al-Bukhary mosque was recently officiated by the Sultan of Kedah.

The Al-Bukhary Foundation's management, headed by Tan Sri Syed Mokhtar Al-Bukhary, refuses to comment on the cost of building the mosque.

The foundation has built several other mosques in the State, including those located in Akar Peluru, Sik and Pantai Johor, but the Al-Bukhary mosque is by far one of the most attractive in Kedah.

The double-storey mosque fronts an open square, where a 30-metre stream runs into a small pond.

Seven blue-coloured domes are inscribed on the inside with the 99 names of Allah. Seven, said a mosque official, was chosen to symbolise how Islam's teachings have spread to all the seven continents.

The mosque's mihrab - the niche indicating the direction in which Mecca lies and where the khatib delivers the Friday prayer sermon - was hand built by Iranian craftsmen. Lifts and other facilities are available for handicapped members of the congregation.

The mosque is only part of a larger network of facilities located and housed in the Al-Bukhary complex.

Apart from the 15,000 capacity mosque, the complex also houses a library, a medical centre, a hostel for orphans, an academy for the elderly, funeral services facilities, meeting rooms, a resource centre, a school and a multi-purpose hall.

Construction of the mosque and the complex began in 1999 on 10.95 hectares of land in Alor Malai at Jalan Langgar. All the facilities are scheduled to be ready for use by early next year. When fully completed, the Al-Bukhary Complex will not only serve Muslims, but also act as a tourist attraction.

More importantly perhaps, the complex serves as a reminder of the contribution which a selfless private charitable foundation is making to foster closer Muslim brotherhood in the country.

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