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Malaysia-Astound

M'SIAN OPEN HOUSE AN ASTOUNDING SUCCESS, SAY FOREIGNERS

By: Mohd Nasir Yusof

JOHOR BAHRU, Dec 22 (Bernama) -- Tourists and media representatives from neighbouring countries applauded the success of the Malaysian Open House 2001 held at the City Square here today.

The foreigners were overwhelmed and astounded with what they saw at the event -- Malaysians from all races and walks of life sharing the joy and excitement in celebrating the Aidilfitri, the festival held to mark the end of the fasting month of Ramadan.

To the foreign visitors and reporters, the scene where thousands of people from various ethnic groups were seen happily mingling and greeting each other was indeed a unique and rare sight.

Agoes Saribo, a tourist from Batam Island, Indonesia, said he was fascinated by the peace and harmony exhibited by Malaysians of various races.

"Such a grand and momentous occasion like this can only be held when there is prosperity, peace and harmony and this is synonymous with Malaysia," he told Bernama at the Aidilfitri Malaysian Open House held at the City Square here.

He said Malaysia was capable of hosting an event of such magnitude as it had a prosperous economy and support of international hotels which sponsored the feast.

Meanwhile a group of 600 foreign broadcast journalists and travel agents who are on a familiarisation trip to Malaysia had a field day capturing the country's essence at the Malaysia Open House 2001.

"Very unique celebration... many Malaysian people... very friendly people," said Thanakorn Sriwarom, a staff of the Bangkok-based Tourism & Trade monthly.

Thanakorn said he was lucky to be able to witness the traditional Aidilfitri open house being held on such a grand scale.

"I understand that such occasions are held by almost all Malaysians during Hari Raya, Christmas and Chinese New Year celebrations," he said.

Vichayant Bpoonchote, a photographer with the Bangkok-based "The Prachachat Business", said he was attracted to the colourful faces of Malaysia especially the traditional costumes worn by performers of the Malay, Chinese, Indian and Iban cultural dances.

"They make very nice pictures," said Vichayant, adding that he also took many pictures including that of The King who graced the Open House with other Malaysian leaders including Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

A tourist from Finland, Katarina Heiskanen, said she was amazed at the size of the Open House which served tens of thousands of guests with free food and drinks.

"For me it's a unique concept of bringing people of all races together for the celebration, for unity," she said.

Heiskanen said she was in Singapore when she came to know about the Malaysian Open House and made the trip here to join in the celebration.

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) student, Amir Ali from Iraq brought his two daughters, Sarah, seven, and Ghada, five, to the Open House so that they would not miss the opportunity to join in the celebration.

Amir said the Open House was among the events which he cherished while studying in Malaysia.

Sarah said she enjoyed the varieties of food she had the chance to

sample at the open house.

A reporter with a Thai daily, The Nation, Sulaiman Yameen, who is based in Hadyaai said despite being familiar with the Malay dishes, he was amazed by the various varieties of food served at the function.

"Everything is good here... the food and (cultural) shows," said the Thai, adding that he would write a special column in the daily about Malaysia's unique open house concept.

-- BERNAMA

MNY ZUL