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Shoot to thrill

Suryana G. Mohamad

LIKE moths to a flame, the two boys were drawn to the clamouring of photographers and their flashing of cameras. "We are going up there to take some shots," one bespectacled boy announced.

The other followed stealthily, his cap perched backward on his head, signalling his readiness.

Their mission: to snap a shot of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad during the opening ceremony of the Paya Indah Wetlands recently.

But it was no easy task: They were considerably shorter than the other photographers.

After being harried back to their seats by an official, their grins said it all: Mission accomplished!

These boys were among a group of students at the opening of Paya Indah Wetlands and the launch of a photography workshop, organised by the New Straits Times in Education (NIE) and Paya Indah Wetlands.

Thirty students, aged between 10 and 12, registered for the one-day workshop, scheduled for Nov 3.

The launch was made especially memorable when Dr Mahathir himself presented the children with disposable cameras, sponsored by Fuji Photo Film (M) Sdn Bhd.

The company is also sponsoring the processing of the film and t-shirts for the students.

During the presentation, one student, seizing the moment, whipped out a computer-generated photo of Dr Mahathir and asked for his autograph.

He was later offered almost RM50 by a persistent colleague but he stubbornly refused to sell.

Ashveer Singh, 10, from Kuala Lumpur, the group's representative during the ceremony, said: "It was so exciting meeting the Prime Minister of Malaysia!"

Although he aspires to become a doctor, he joined the workshop because he enjoys photography and "trying new things".

Another participant, Grace Wong, 12, from KL, began snapping photos at the tender age of six!

Influenced by her father's love of photography, she said: "I was born with a passion for nature. I started photography because I wanted to follow my father."

Cheah Kah Peng, 11, from KL, said the workshop was part of his birthday present, adding that he looked forward to capturing the animals on film. And if the photos taken by Amira Baharin, 11, from KL, are like her smile, they will be captivating.

"My mother told me about this workshop. I joined because I find workshops lots of fun," she said.

Helming the workshop is professional photographer Eric Peris, who will touch on technical aspects such as composition.

The day also includes a tour of a photo exhibition, allowing students to pick up some professional tips from the exhibit.

Students will then roam the wetlands, armed with their disposable cameras, snapping whatever catches their eye.

Peris aims to give students the freedom to explore and experiment.

"I believe that children should first learn to 'see' the picture. The technical side comes later.

"The results should be very interesting. Children see things differently

because they have not been exposed to books on photography and the typical rules and regulations."

Moreover, he adds, the wetland's natural attractions, such as the hippopotami, scenery and fresh air, made it an ideal choice for the workshop.

"Hopefully, students will also learn more about nature and its importance," he says.

After just a taste of the wetlands, both Amira and Grace were enthusiastically planning for their return.

"We are going to take lots of photos of the hippos, butterflies, lotus flowers and trees!" they said.