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Bukit Kayu Hitam checkpoint to open for 24 hours on Saturday

ALOR STAR, Sun. - The Bukit Kayu Hitam border checkpoint will remain open for 24 hours on Saturday to facilitate the entry and departure of visitors from Thailand to the national Hari Raya Aidilfitri open house celebrations at Jitra that evening.

Malaysian citizens will, however, be subject to the normal operating hours of the checkpoint on that day, which are from 6am to midnight.

Deputy Home Minister Datuk Chor Chee Heung said the Government's decision to allow the border checkpoint to remain open for 24 hours was only for Saturday and was limited to the entry of Thai nationals.

"Confirmed for attendance are Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and several members of his Cabinet," he said after attending a Hari Raya gathering at the Anti-Smuggling Unit centre in Bukit Kayu Hitam yesterday evening.

The open house celebrations will be held at 8pm at Taman Tasik Bandar Darul Aman in Jitra and is jointly organised by the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism and the Kedah Government.

Yang diPertuan Agong Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin and Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Fauziah along with the Sultan and Sultanah of Kedah, will be present.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is also scheduled to attend the function.

Dr Mahathir and several members of the Cabinet, along with Kedah Government officials, are scheduled to travel to Haadyai the next day to hold talks with their Thai counterparts.

A statement by the Culture, Arts and Tourism Ministry said the national open house was to promote unity and understanding among the people and foster closer ties between leaders and the people.

The open house themed - Malaysia A Tourist Nation: Festivals, Carnivals and Brightness Throughout - is expected to be attended by 100,000 people.

There will be a fireworks display, cultural performances as well as performances by local and Thai artistes.

Chor, who earlier inspected the Immigration and Customs checkpoint at the border checkpoint, said he was confident that the authorities would be able to cope with the expected influx of visitors.

He said there were no plans to extend the normal operating hours of the checkpoint for Malaysians, due to the high number of locals who travel to Thailand.

Chor said that while arrivals of Thai nationals at the checkpoint was 584,441 from January to November this year, the number of Malaysian departures at the checkpoint was 1,536,388.

He said the authorities manning the checkpoint, including police and the Anti-Smuggling Unit, have been directed to be alert on Saturday.