

22/12/2002

Malaysians, Thais celebrate Hari Raya together

JITRA, Sat. - In the true spirit of neighbourliness, thousands of Malaysians and Thais celebrated Hari Raya Aidilfitri at the national open house tonight.

The crowd started streaming into the Bandar Darulaman theme park as early as 5pm.

Their spirits were not dampened by the intermittent rain which fell in the late afternoon. The weather cleared up in the evening.

Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his Cabinet members were the guests of honour.

They were joined by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Cabinet Ministers Datuk Seri Najib Razak (Defence), Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz (International Trade and Industry), Datuk Chua Jui Meng (Health), Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn (Human Resources) and Datuk Amar Leo Moggie (Energy, Communications and Multimedia).

Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain and other Federal and State officials were also present.

Dr Mahathir and Thaksin arrived at the venue at 9.30pm. Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Syed Putra Jamalullail, Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Fauziah Tengku Abdul Rashid and the Sultan and Sultanah of Kedah arrived 20 minutes later.

The King opened the event at 10.30pm, lighting up a giant ketupat pulut. Guests were earlier treated to a sumptuous feast.

The spread consisted of local delicacies such as laksa Kedah, ketupat pulut (glutinous rice), ketupat nasi, rendang and serunding.

In his speech, Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Paduka Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir said Thailand and Malaysia were in the best possible position to lead the way in intra-Asean travel.

"Currently, both countries have about 1.2 million people visiting each other. This number is too small.

"The ideal target for the next few years should be five million visits from both sides."

Syed Razak said the event was also special because it was held in Kubang Pasu district which is situated in Dr Mahathir's parliamentary constituency.

He said the event was meaningful as this was the last Hari Raya open house for Dr Mahathir in his capacity as prime minister.

The North-South Expressway was packed with vehicles as visitors made their way to the 11 parking areas located in Jitra and Alor Star, with a shuttle bus service ferrying them to the venue.

The celebration ended with a 20-minute fireworks display and an entertainment showcase by Malaysian and Thai artistes.

Malaysia was represented by Siti Nurhaliza, Erra Fazira, KRU and Thailand by Sob Chai Kriyon Sen, Narumn Chirangkur and Yupa Jaiyen.

The event, telecast live on RTM1, was also covered by media from 14 countries, including the United States, Spain, Japan, France, India and Saudi Arabia.

Twenty-four international television stations also covered the event.