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Warriors

FANNING THE FLAME OF PATRIOTISM THROUGH MERDEKA CELEBRATIONS

By: Abdul Halim Taib

KUALA LUMPUR: Patriotism has long pulsed in the life of the people down the pages of history, marked by patriots known and unknown who had played their role to cast off the shackles of colonialism.

Today, the stories have taken a different beat. The main role and responsibility of the post-Merdeka generations is to build up the "meaning" of nationhood.

Nevertheless, the sacrifices of the old "warriors" will be remembered forever. And for this purpose the Civics Bureau (BTN), an agency under the Prime Minister's Department, has drawn up various National Day programmes to highlight the contribution of these patriots.

The programmes that are very symbolical -- from Aug 2 to Sept 16 - are also meant to fan the flame of patriotism among the rakyat.

Director-General of BTN Datuk Dr Nordin Kardi noted that most of the Merdeka celebrations are concentrated in the state capitals and major towns, leaving the "Merdeka warriors" living the rural areas on the sidelines.

He said even if there were National Day celebrations in the villages, their programmes were brief and limited.

#### IN SEARCH OF MERDEKA HEROES

As such, Dr Nordin said, "BTN will try to unearth the local leaders who had made their sacrifices for independence. They might be popular in their locale, but they are not known (to the nation)."

He said at the same time, the "Malam Puisi Patriotik" (Night of Patriotic Poetry) which is part of the celebrations, would be staged for the fourth consecutive year as a tribute to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

For this year, BTN hoped to chart another "Malaysia Book of Records" in its unique programme as was achieved two years ago.

That programme is a continuous walk by a group of women from Jeli in Kelantan to Tanjung Puteri in Johor Baharu.

However, said Dr Nordin, what is important is not a record-making feat but a programme to bring together women of all races and creeds to experience the meaning of nationhood and to fan the flame of patriotism in the country.

#### IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE HEROES

Under the theme of "Following the Foot Steps of the Heroes", Dr Nordin said the Merdeka Walk 2003 event is the third to be held by BTN, costing RM2.28 million for the 45-day duration.

The walk is through three routes; the first started from Langkawi on Aug 2 and the second from Jeli on Aug 3. They are to end at Tanjung Puteri on Sept 16.

The third, from Kuching on Aug 20 is to end at Kota Kinabalu on Sept 16.

He said the walkers from Langkawi and Jeli met up at Kuala Pilah before continuing their walk together to Tanjung Puteri.

Dr Nordin said the record they had set was the Patriotic Citizens' Walk of 2001 when the participants walked all the way from Padang Besar to Tanjung Piai, the southern-most tip of mainland Asia.

He said they chose Tanjung Piai in order to make the land mark more

known to the rakyat, in contrast of the Japanese tourists who had long made a beeline to the site.

The second feat was set in 2002 when the participants walked non-stop for 24 hours, legging it from Melaka to Putrajaya.

These walks had started their walk on the night of Aug 28 to reach Dataran Putra Perdana in Putrajaya on the night of Aug 29, in time to attend Dr Mahathir's poetry reading session in conjunction with the Night of Patriotic Poetry programme.

Dr Nordin said the Merdeka walks had been effective because the routes pass through the birth places of the leaders who had contributed to the nation.

For example, in the walk of 2001, they came across a local leader in Johore who had cycled alongside the late Datuk Onn Jaafar when the latter embarked on his campaign trail to demand for independence.

#### HISTORIAL SITES

The participants, he said, would re-trace the paths of history by rafts, boats or bicycles along the local people, holding high the "Jalur Gemilang".

At the same time, history would be re-enacted with cultural presentations like the "gabus" and "gamelan" in the community halls or school fields.

On the poetry session with the Prime Minister during the Night of Patriotic Poetry event, Dr Nordin said the response has been encouraging because through the session, the people can get a glimpse of the feelings, dreams, vision and struggle of Dr Mahathir all this while.

"If you look at it closely, most of the content (of the poem) came from his previous speeches," he said.

The titles of the poems read out by the Prime Minister over the last four years are "Erti Kemerdekaan" (The Meaning of Independence) on Aug 29, 2000; "Dari Runtuhan Kota Melaka Kita Dirikan Putrajaya" (From The Ruins of Malacca Fort We Built Putrajaya) on Aug 29, 2001; "Menghadapi Cabaran Menantang Bangsa" (Facing Challenges to Uplift the Race) on Aug 29, 2002 and "Damainya Negeriku" (Peaceful is My Country) on Aug 29, 2003.

In short, the BTN has through its National Day programmes in all the years drawn the post-Merdeka generations to reflect on the struggles and sacrifices of the leaders, and keep the spirit of Merdeka aflame.

-- BERNAMA

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