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Feature-Pekan Rabu

PEKAN RABU TO SPREAD ITS WINGS TO OTHER STATES IN MALAYSIA

By: Melati Mohd Ariff

KUALA LUMPUR: Fancy going to Pulau Pinang or Johor or any other state in Malaysia and finding yourself staring at a market place called "Pekan Rabu".

For those familiar with it, they would know that it is a 'shopping haven' for local tidbits, traditional food/cakes and handicraft as found in Alor Star, Kedah.

The name is also synonymous with the former premier, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad who, during his youth, operated a stall at this famous Pekan Rabu in the heart of the capital of Kedah. It was here too that he was fondly called "Che Det" by his friends.

And if Koperasi Pekan Rabu that manages Pekan Rabu has its way, Pekan Rabu will no longer be the sole right of Alor Star. Yes, Pekan Rabu will spread its wings to all states of Malaysia, including Sabah and Sarawak.

According to Koperasi Pekan Rabu Alor Setar's chairman, Haji Azmi bin Shahab, the idea of setting up Pekan Rabu outside Kedah was first discussed with Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad when the former premier officiated the Koperasi's Annual General Meeting (AGM) in 2001.

"The first Pekan Rabu outside Alor Star is planned to be opened in Penang. We have discussed this with the Penang state government and we have also spoken to the current Prime Minister 'Pak Lah'," said Haji Azmi.

#### SPREADING ITS WINGS

Pekan Rabu is already 'crammed' with traders and that is why the cooperative would like to spread its wings and concept with the cooperation of the respective state governments.

Haji Azmi who has been chairman of the cooperative for the past six years explained that Pekan Rabu would still be a trading site only for the Malays.

"The Malays are still left behind in the retail trade. Some rentals are very high, what more of buying their own building. The opening of more Pekan Rabu can be seen as a way to provide them with business opportunity. We want to educate the Malay traders to do their businesses in a proper environment. We do not want them to only ply their trade at the night markets or at the five foot-ways. Is this the image of our Malay traders?" he asked.

He said Pekan Rabu will maintain the traditional elements such as local tidbits and local food/cakes to keep its identify in the states where they are located.

At the same time, the traders would be trained under one building. As such, he said the cooperative will be requesting state governments to provide a building solely for the Pekan Rabu project.

Koperasi Pekan Rabu that is spearheading the project will also identify potential traders to set up their businesses at the new site.

#### TRADING FOR THREE GENERATIONS

The famous Pekan Rabu in Alor Star was formed in 1932 as Syarikat Kerja Sama-Sama Tanggungan Berhad, before changing to its present name in 1975 when its building shifted from Tanjung Chali to its present site at Jalan Tunku Ibrahim. To date, Koperasi Pekan Rabu has 1,340 members.

"All our members are Malays and are Muslims. They are also locals. In total, we have 340 shops. The traders here have been trading for the past three generations. There are now even grandchildren who are carrying out their grandfathers' businesses," explained Haji Azmi.

Pekan Rabu is divided into three sections: the arcade, market and restaurants.

At the arcade section for example, one can find varieties of items such as clothes, handicraft, jewellery, books, crockery, picture frames and local tidbits not available in other places.

"The local tidbits are also sent to Kuala Lumpur and Johor Baharu. We

got help from Matrade but the volume is still small because the production itself is limited.

"We are now gearing towards R&D. We are discussing with SMIDEC (Small and Medium Industries Development Corporation) to enhance the quality of the products produced by our members to meet the export requirement," he added.

According to Haji Azmi, the cooperative will also be doing Quality Control for the local producers in Kedah.

#### GOOD BUSINESS

On the performance of Pekan Rabu's traders, Haji Azmi said they are enjoying good business and there is an improvement from year to year.

"We can see this from the economic status of the members. There are some who went on pilgrimage every year, others have their own houses now, bigger cars and opening bigger shops outside Pekan Rabu.

"These are the traders whose business had thrived and later moved out from Pekan Rabu to make way for other traders. In this sense, Pekan Rabu acts like an incubator for the traders, educating and training them until they attained success and are ready to leave for the outside world. They are still members of the Cooperative even though their businesses are now outside Pekan Rabu," said the chairman.

As part of the efforts to further promote Pekan Rabu, this shopping haven has been included in the calendar of the Mega Sales Carnival and 'Cuti-Cuti Malaysia' holiday programmes promoted by the Malaysian Promotion Tourism Board (MPTB).

Those who have visited Pekan Rabu in recent years would have noticed the tent-liked structures built around the Pekan Rabu. One is called Dataran Che Det Mall and the other Dataran Che Det Walk. Both are sites for special events organised by the cooperative as its ongoing efforts to promote the shopping centre.

Some great events that had been held at the site were Biotechnology

Fest, Flora Fest and Education Info. Last March 6, the cooperative organised a Job Carnival, the first of its kind, jointly with the Labour Department, MARA Kedah, the Public Services Department, IPTA and IPTS.

"This is our social service to the people where the public can obtain information on job opportunities," said Haji Azmi.

-- BERNAMA

MMA KGO