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British Scouts up to the task

IT WAS a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and the roomful of British Scouts, 100 in all, rushed to shake hands with Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The Scouts were part of an 800-member contingent that had attended the 20th World Scouts Jamboree in Sattahip, Thailand and were visiting Malaysia for three days last week.

After the jamboree, the contingent had made its way to Malaysia and while 100 were able to meet the Prime Minister at Putra Jaya, 700 others were experiencing Malaysian life with foster families.

During their stay here from Jan 10, the British Scouts participated in the home-hospitality programme organised by the Scout Association of Malaysia (PPM) in close collaboration with the King's Scout Brotherhood.

States which hosted the Scouts included Pahang, Penang, Perak, Selangor, the Federal Territory, Negri Sembilan and Malacca.

The British Scouts were the third contingent to visit Malaysia after groups from Sweden and Colombia.

There were Scouts who stayed with Felda settlers in Pahang, Negri Sembilan and Perak so that they could experience kampung lifestyle as opposed to the hustle and bustle of city life, which many were already acquainted with.

They got to experience Malaysian culture including eating rice with fingers and wearing sarongs.

One foster family even took the Scouts to a tahlil and a Malay wedding.

The Scouts were aged 14 to 17 and the boys outnumbered the girls.

Not all of them were British nationals though. Some came from other European countries such as Holland and Germany but all are attending British schools.

At the meeting with Dr Mahathir, the Prime Minister told them that Malaysia is a peaceful and harmonious country with diverse cultures.

He emphasised that Malaysia is against terrorism and said that war does not solve anything.

Asked about their opinion of Malaysia, Keanan Kleczka, 14, a Scout for eight years, said Malaysians are very warm and welcoming. He liked his stay here as "everyone is laid-back and relaxed."

Lizzie Goodwin, 17, a Guide for seven years, said it was her first trip to Malaysia and she found the country beautiful and different. She promised to return.

Roman Lelou, 16, a Belgian who goes to school in England, has been a Scout for eight years. He liked the hot weather in Malaysia and the spicy exotic Asian food.

Sarah Heap, who had her birthday on the day she met Dr Mahathir (she turned 17), said meeting the Prime Minister was even better than receiving presents. She found Malaysia fascinating, with its different races.

Large contingents of Scouts and some Guides (Girl Scouts) meet every four years in different countries for these jamborees.

Countries where the jamborees have been held include Chile, Holland and South Korea.

The jamboree has come to symbolise hope and peace for the youth of every nation and gives them the chance to discover and learn new cultures, customs and traditions.

It is also the time for Scouts to face challenges and have fun and

participate in heaps of outdoor activities.