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Get ready for 'rhythm and movement'

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The slowdown in the country's tourism industry will not dampen the celebration of the country's arts and culture when the "Bulan Citrawarna Malaysia 2003" or Colours of Malaysia kicks off on Saturday for a month.

Organised by the Culture, Arts and Tourism Ministry through Tourism Malaysia, the nationwide event, bearing the theme "Rhythm and Movement", will showcase the uniqueness and diversity of Malaysia to local and foreign tourists alike.

Minister Datuk Paduka Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir said while the fear of travelling caused by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in the region had put a damper on tourism, the ministry had been promoting Malaysia as before and Citrawarna would be just the right platform to prove that the country was safe from the killer disease.

He said the celebrations, in its fifth year running, would involve more than 6,000 participants from various performing troupes representing the country's ethnic groups.

"We want the celebrations to serve as an attraction to foreign and domestic tourists, thus stimulating the tourism industry."

As proof, travel packages with festival tie-ins have already attracted 500 tourists from Thailand and 600 from Indonesia.

Citrawarna will be from May 24 to June 27, with the launch to be held at Dataran Merdeka on Saturday, and graced by Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin and Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Fauziah, accompanied by a 1,350-strong royal procession.

There will also be many song and dance performances by various troupes representing the different States and ethnic groups, all as part of the attempt to project "Malaysia's peaceful and harmonious multi-racial community" to foreign visitors.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali as well as Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and wife Datuk Seri Endon Mahmood are also expected to attend, in addition to other Cabinet members and ambassadors.

Kadir said today that the festival would feature three main activities - a procession showcasing the arts and cultures of Negri Sembilan on June 7, a "Malam Gegar Pendekar" (Warriors' Rumble) on June 13 in Kelantan featuring a display of silat performances by 2,003 "warriors", and the finale in Kedah, which is a three-day, three-night gathering of local artistes.

Additionally, there will be 57 other activities to be organised throughout the country during the period featuring various cultural performances and culinary delights unique to the states.

He said the ministry would be promoting Citrawarna through advertising in local and regional electronic and print media.

It will also be receiving sponsorship from several foreign media corporations, including the BBC, CNBC, AXN and CNN.