

Bario Nukenen Festival pulls bigger crowd than expected

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(Front row, from second right) Antonio, Isaac, Gerawat and Sikie in a photo-call with others after the official opening.

MIRI: The three-day 'Pesta Nukenen Bario' (Bario Nukenen Festival) that ended in Bario on Saturday was a resounding success.

The some 2,000 guests and tourists present had a taste of the Kelabit community's traditions and cultures.

Rurum Kelabit Sarawak deputy president and deputy organising chairman Dr Philip Raja said the organising committee had only expected a turnout of about 1,000 people.

“We are very happy about the overwhelming response. Some of them are from overseas. A number of them are from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak,” he told The Borneo Post yesterday.

“They were enchanted with our Kelabit cultures, food, hospitality, and friendship.”

Assistant Minister for Arts and Culture Datuk John Sikie Tayai represented Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Amar Abang Johari Tun Openg at the official opening of the annual festival and also that of the Malaysia’s Community Museum.

Among those present were his wife Datin Melia Gelen, Minister of Welfare, Women and Community Wellbeing Datuk Fatimah Abdullah, Mulu assemblyman Datuk Gerawat Gala, Miri Resident Antonio Kathi Galis, political secretary to chief minister Kijan Toynbee, Ruram Kelabit Sarawak president Datuk Isaac Lugun and organising chairperson Lilla Raja.

Pesta Nukenen Bario, which entered its 11th edition this year, was run by Rurum Kelabit Sarawak. It was initiated to preserve the traditional processing methods of indigenous edible plants, as well as to safeguard local plants and animals.

It was also aimed at becoming a platform to draw members of the close-knit community closer.

Over the years, however, the festival has evolved into an annual event to celebrate the legacy of the Kelabits, and their unique way of life.

Besides food and handicraft promotions, the festival also features cultural performances and exhibitions.