

KUCHING WINS GOLD FOR UNITY IN DIVERSITY

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It has been a period of celebration for the people in Kuching and nearby areas over the past few days. After flocking to the Sarawak Stadium in full force and spirit of high camaraderie for the closing ceremony of the 18th edition of the Malaysia Games (Sukma) on Sunday, the euphoria continued the following night with the celebration of the 28th anniversary of Kuching city on Monday.

Thousands of citizens gathered at the Kuching South City Council theatre in Jalan Padungan to join Yang di-Pertua Negeri Sarawak Tun Abdul Taib Mahmud and his wife, the ever resplendent Toh Puan Raghad Kurdi Taib, to commemorate the event.

The unity among the crowd was visible, which might have compelled Chief Minister Tan Sri Adenan Satem and the Sarawak government to transform the Kuching Reservoir Park into a Unity Park. Adenan's announcement was timely since it was on the very same date last year that Kuching had been proclaimed as the first "City of Unity" in Malaysia by the 1Malaysia Foundation.

"The park with unity as its theme befits the present status of Kuching, which has been declared the 'City of Unity'. "We are proud that Kuching is the first city in the country to be conferred this status," added Adenan. Prior to the declaration, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had given his endorsement that Kuching and Sarawak, generally, were the best example of the spirit promoted by the 1Malaysia concept, which is to nurture greater harmony and tolerance among people of diverse backgrounds.

Even Youth and Sports Minister Khairy Jamaluddin could not stop admiring the peace and harmony among the crowd of thousands during the opening ceremony of the 18th Sukma on July 18.

Political scientist Dr Jeniri Amir said there were many reasons why Kuching deserved the declaration accorded by the 1Malaysia Foundation. “Kuching is a colourful city, populated by people from 40 ethnic and sub-ethnic groups. There is no tension or any untoward incidents arising from ethnic conflict. “It is fair for Kuching to earn such a recognition, and this should be celebrated by the people. “The city is not only clean and beautiful but the people in Kuching and gene

rally in the state also live in peace,” said Jeniri of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. On the political aspect, he explained that Kuching housed a political entity with a diverse membership comprising various indigenous ethnic communities in the form of Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu, which is the backbone of ruling coalition Barisan Nasional in Sarawak. “Even the Sarawak United Peoples’ Party (SUPP), a Chinese-majority party, also has members from the indigenous communities.

“Political consensus among parties representing different segments of the community is apparent, representing the aspirations of the various ethnic groups for the betterment of the state,” Jeniri said, adding that cohesion among the state’s multi-ethnic society was the pivotal factor that had driven economic progress. Kuching needs to move forward and become the best example of how a multi-ethnic society must interact and work together to ensure that development continues.

Jeniri said the state government should establish a museum that displayed the history and culture of the various ethnic and sub-ethnic groups of Sarawak. Apart from supplementing the role of the Cultural Village in Santubong to attract tourists, the museum, he added, could also be a medium to educate the younger generation on the history and culture of other races and religions and to continue to embrace that spirit of unity. “However, all this infrastructure and status will be meaningless if there is no mutual understanding and tolerance among us,” said Jeniri.

“Let us continue to work together and show the world why Kuching is the best example of unity in diversity.” Adib Povera, born in Kuala Lumpur, raised in Perak, is NST Sarawak bureau chief. A nature lover, he never tires of discovering new sights in the Land of the Hornbills

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