

Notts rallies them from all over Britain

Dato' Dzul kifli Abd Razak

Article

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The Notts Games held in Britain last week for the 21st time brought together Malaysian students studying there for fun, games, food and free exchange of ideas. Three Malaysian ministers took time to be there.

MOST Malaysians have not heard of the Notts Games despite it being around for more than two decades.

It stands for the Nottingham Games, an effort by Malaysian students studying at the University of Nottingham. Over the years, students from other universities got involved too.

Their aim was simple: To get as many Malaysian students as possible to interact, especially the new ones who have just set foot on the campus or Britain for that matter.

Year after year, the students have kept at it, with support from various quarters, notably the Malaysian Ministry of Education the Malaysian Students Department (Britain) and, recently, the Ministry of Higher Education.

Spurred by the collective enthusiasm of the students, the Notts Games has a large gathering, attracting Malaysian students from the length and breadth of England, Scotland and Wales.

It is not just sports. The games has also doubled as a Malaysian Food Festival of sorts.

The appetite-whetting menus range from nasi lemak to the diverse types of noodles.

The 21st Notts Games was held at the Nottingham main campus last week, with a record number of 5,200 students attending.

Two Cabinet ministers (Higher Education, Education, Domestic Trade and Consumers Affairs) and two vice-chancellors from Malaysia attended the games.

It was a freezing Saturday morning on Nov 4 when busloads of students began arriving at the Games' venue.

Some had started their journey late night on the day before, others in the wee hours of the morning to be on time for the opening ceremony of the Games.

The temperature hovered just above zero degree Celsius with frost still visible on the ground.

But this couldn't dampen the spirit of the Games, and the warmth and excitement that oozed from the near ecstatic crowd.

As the frost melted away to make way for the enthusiasts and their supporters, the Minister of Higher Education applauded the spirit of *Malaysia Boleh* in his opening address.

This spirit was on full display, transcending all the artificial borders and barriers that can otherwise fragment Malaysian society.

Such was the spirit that the students decided to come voluntarily and participate despite the rather harsh weather conditions, and the many inconveniences, including journeys lasting up to seven hours.

The minister proudly likened the gathering as a "mini" Malaysia.

A British officer in charge of the sporting facilities that housed the Games noticed the difference with games organised by students from other nations the week before.

By comparison, the games the week before were not only smaller but also less diverse in terms of the number of participants and participation, and of lesser standing if the involvement of dignitaries was taken into account.

This was not all. The intangibles that are innately Malaysian which keep the bond of ties ever so strong and sincere among fellow students was keenly felt.

No doubt things were not perfect, but the staying power of the Notts Games nurtured by such good intentions was never in doubt. And it is getting better.

The outcome can only be positive and healthy for these young generations of potential leaders far away from home.

What made it even more special this time around was the DeepaRaya celebration held after the successful completion of the Games.

The event that took place in the evening resembled another typical Malaysian tradition — the open house.

There was also an intense demonstration of the cultural talent, in a jam-packed "dining hall" of the university.

Here, all the winners were roundly applauded and presented with trophies at a simple yet meaningful ceremony. Not unexpectedly, Nottingham University became the overall champion.

There were other champions too, albeit behind the scene. First, was the group of students who wore bright yellow T-shirts with the letters "vlntr" blazed across the front.

Yes, they were the more-than-willing volunteers who ensured that the events of the day proceeded with as few hiccups as possible.

Another group of champions was the organising committee which had been planning the event tirelessly for months, with every member making sure that everything fell in place on the big day.

Still, there were others, like the groups of intellectual "vlntrs" who had been unselfishly contributing ideas on how to continuously improve the education system back home.

What is most striking is the level of maturity shown by virtually everyone who spoke and aired their concerns during the pre-Games discourse that stretched into the night.

While discussion about education at home often invites some highly charged exchanges, the ones at Nottingham exemplify what we can all learn from each other.

In his closing speech, the Minister of Education was spot on when he expressed how privileged we all were to be part of a meaningful occasion that will for sure stay fresh in our minds for a very long time to come.

Perhaps the best "independent" testimony to this came from four British students who had the opportunity to study for a year in Malaysia.

They had nothing but words of praise and said they were lucky to have had the opportunity to sample the unique Malaysian phenomena that has further enriched their educational adventure.

Kudos to all who have made the Notts Games a memorable experience.

And, more significantly, it serves to remind us of what lies ahead if only we stay as one people, one nation with one big heart, regardless of where we are.

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