

The Star - Friday November 6, 2009

Boost for Baba Nyonya culture

By CHOONG MEK ZHIN

IN an effort to support the development of the Baba Nyonya culture, the Information, Communications and Culture Ministry has given RM10,000 to the Peranakan Baba Nyonya Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Association (PPBNKLS) to carry out its programmes.

Its Deputy Minister, Heng Sei Kie, said at the association's official launch held at the National Museum that there was plenty to be learnt from the Peranakan culture.

"The Babas and Nyonyas embody the idea of cultural diversity in unity. They have adapted and borrowed with ingenuity, resourcefulness and open minds to develop a distinctive culture that is colourful and unique," Heng said.



Having fun: Heng (second from right) dancing after the launch of the Peranakan Baba Nyonya Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Association.

She added that understanding the Peranakan experience and its legacy was a vital step towards nation-building that would consolidate the 1Malaysia concept in developing a peaceful, vibrant and multicultural country.

The association is the seventh of its kind around the world and was established about a year ago.

It was between 1900 and 1920 that the first three associations were formed in Singapore, Malacca and Penang, places that used to be under one administration called the British Straits Settlements.

“There are two Peranakan associations in Singapore as well as one in Penang and Malacca, the places of the Baba Nyonya origins. Eventually, another two more were formed in Thailand and Australia and now we have the Kuala Lumpur and Selangor chapter,” Heng said.

Before the launching ceremony, an Inaugural International Peranakan Conference themed “Baba Nyonya: A Multicultural Living Legacy” was held.

The conference saw association president Professor Dr Lee Su Kim giving a keynote address as well as five other paper presentations by various local and international speakers.



Interesting: Heng (right) getting details on some of the items on display at the launch.

According to Lee, about 350 people attended the event and it came as a surprise.

“We had to turn down many people because of limited seats.

“This, however, shows that there is a lot of interest among the people to know more about the culture,” Lee said.

Currently there are about 60 members in the chapter and people who are not Baba or Nyonya may actually join the association as associate members.

Those who attended the conference also got to witness a Baba Nyonya wedding ceremony and got the opportunity to show off their moves during the dondang sayang and joget activity.