

A new beginning with Unity Week

Sarawak sets the stage to celebrate Malaysians coming together as one people.

NATIONAL Unity Minister Datuk Aaron Ago Dagang (*pic*) is not a person who gets excited easily. He has a calm and composed personality but as the country celebrates its first Unity Week, the Sarawakian politician cannot hide his enthusiasm.

"Yes, I am eagerly looking forward to the kick-off of the week-long celebrations which will be held at the Kuching waterfront," he said.

The Kanowit MP had wanted Unity Week to start in the peninsula but his ministry staff members convinced him that there was no need to be apologetic as Sarawak was indeed a model state which embraced diversity and unity was indeed practised.

The 64-year-old low-profile Parti Rakyat Sarawak (PRS) leader is himself a living example of a true Malaysian.

"I am an Iban, but my wife is from the Orang Ulu ethnic group. There are Muslims, Chinese and even a Caucasian in our family.

"We celebrate all festivals together in the true Malaysian spirit. I am proud of it and in

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Comment

Sarawak, many places of worship of different religions are located next to each other.

"There is no issue. That's the beauty of Sarawak and, I am sure, Sabah too," he said in an interview at his ministry office in Putrajaya.

The occasion will start this Saturday with a walk-run-ride event to be flagged off by Aaron at the iconic Waterfront. An estimated 2,000 people will join the run while 500 will take part in the bike event.

The organisers hope to set a national record for having the largest number of people dressed up in their respective ethnic cos-



Openg and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim will also be present.

Aaron makes no pretence that unity among the various races will be achieved overnight from the week's celebrations.

"I look at this positively. When people come together, it's a new beginning.

"When they show up to participate, it's a success," he said.

Aaron believes that friendship and relationships will be cultivated from these events, including smaller-scale ones such as exhibitions, pet contests, buskers' performances and cultural shows.

"No one will be left out as all states, including Kelantan, Kedah, Terengganu and Perlis (which are held by the Opposition), will take part.

"There will be no politics, just Malaysians coming together as one people," he said.

What I look forward to most is the inaugural *Setia Perpaduan* song, composed by the veteran singer Datuk DJ Dave, which will feature 13 singers.

Even the King had a hand in it

as he made some proposals, especially the lyrics, when it was first presented to him.

Dave has put all this together for Sunday's event.

Dave has been involved in walks organised by *The Star* to promote racial unity and moderation in the past, and certainly his 1973 hit song *Maafkanlah* incorporates Chinese beats, Malay lyrics and Indian melodies.

Malay language academician Prof Dr Lim Swee Ting provided the most important line in the inspiring song – "berbeza kita, tidak memisahkan (we have our differences, but that does not divide)" – while composer S. Atan did the musical arrangements.

At a time when some politicians still want to harp on race and religion, it is indeed uplifting and encouraging that efforts have been made to instil the spirit of national unity and to celebrate diversity.

Malaysia is made up of many races, but we all know that we are one nation and one nationality, and that national unity is a pillar of madani. Let no one tell us differently.