

Students from the Malaysian Student Association gathered in their traditional garb to celebrate their culture. (Photo by Michael Layton)

A taste of something new

Malaysian students host a cultural banquet

BY MICHAEL LAYTON

While many students enjoy the luxury of a trip home during the spring break, there is one group of students at Dalhousie for whom such a voyage is not possible. Instead of travelling 14,512 kilometres to home, the Malaysian Student Association (MSA) brought a bit of their culture to Canada.

On Sunday, Feb. 23, the Malaysian students celebrated the recent end of Ramadan, the fasting month. With the holiday "hari raya Aidil Fitri" and the arrival of the Chinese New Year, Malaysian students were busy decorating the Dentistry lounge with bright, colourful drapes and cards. Also on display were pictures of their home country depicting the diverse land and seascape found in its 14 states.

Upon arrival, Malaysian and Canadian guests were greeted with warm, friendly handshakes from the hosts, who then brought their hands up to their chest as a sign that their greeting came from the heart.

After guests were welcomed, they were led to the banquet, a lavish and unique assortment of Malaysian delicacies which proved too tempting to resist. Everyone in attendance had the opportunity to sample popular Malaysian dishes such as satay, nasi lemak, rendang, roti canai, murtabak, laksa, rice and noodles.

The variety of flavours delighted everyone's taste buds. However, be forewarned that Malaysian cuisine is known for its abundance of spices.

Between courses, the Malaysian students, Canadian guests, and visiting government officials chatted the night away while authentic Malaysian music wafted in the background.

Many members of the MSA wore graceful robes. Women dressed in robes called kebaya while men donned baju melayu. To add to the beauty of the garments, they wore colourful headdresses called "tudung". These scarves have proven very useful as ear-warmers during Nova Scotia's chilly winter gales.

For many students, the evening was a reminder of their proud Malaysian heritage.

In 1993, Dalhousie formed a partnership with the Malaysian government which has resulted in the development of a small Malaysian community on campus. Dalhousie is currently home to over 60 future Malaysian doctors, dentists, and engineers.

The cultural differences between our countries, not to mention our Canadian winter, prove to be a challenge for arriving students. They must not only perfect their English while maintaining high grades, but adapt to life in a country very different from their own. Malaysia is a tropical

wonderland, with a hot and constantly humid climate. Thus, Malaysian students find Canada's weather rather harsh.

The native tongue of Malaysia is quite different from both French and English. This has prompted some students to change their names slightly. Nik Mazuan Nik Rosdy, for example, has decided to go by 'Nik', while Tuan Amirah Syed Abdul Hamid has adopted the nickname Amy.

Many Malaysian students can often be found playing badminton, soccer, or adhering to their intensive prayer schedule; which at times is difficult to integrate into our Western lifestyle. Many students, although enjoying their experience in Canada, are eager to return home this summer to visit their family. Some of these students have not seen their families in over three years.

The MSA and its members hope to grow and share their cultural background with other students at Dalhousie. The students of this society intend to return to Malaysia with medical, dental, and engineering educations. Once home, they hope their new degrees will help their country continue to develop.

Those who wish to learn more about Malaysia and the Malaysia Student Association and participate in upcoming events may send e-mail to MSA@is2.dal.ca.

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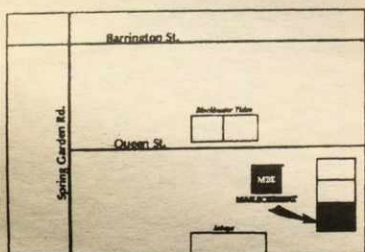
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