



Meetings: Johor State Secretary Datuk Obet Tawel welcoming Sultan Ibrahim at the high tea ceremony.



Beautiful landmark: The people waiting along Jalan Arab at the elephant processions decor to see the arrival of Sultan Ibrahim.



Happy crowd: Guests lining up for food and drinks at the high tea ceremony.



Regal: Sultan Ibrahim inspecting the guard of honour outside the Muar Diamond Jubilee Hall accompanied by his son Tunku Panglima Johor Tunku Abdul Rahman Sultan Ibrahim.



Colourful: Dancers performing a traditional number at the celebration.



Impressive: Guests admiring and taking pictures of the cakes presented by hotels to Sultan Ibrahim.

Splendid royal birthday celebration

Sultan Ibrahim declares Bandar Maharani as Johor's first royal town

By **HAMDAN RAJA ABDULLAH and CHRISTINA TAN**
metrose@thestar.com.my

MUAR: The town, once regarded as a sleepy hollow, has become alive with a hive of activities in conjunction with the five-day birthday celebration of Johor Ruler Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar.

The celebrations, which began on Nov 21 with the Tahliil and thanksgiving prayers at Masjid Sultan Abu Bakar, ended with a dazzling fireworks display along Sg Muar late Sunday.

The highlight of the celebration was when Sultan Ibrahim declared Bandar Maharani here as the state's first royal town. Other events include a mammoth tea party, which was attended by thousands and an array of water spot activities along the Muar River.

The celebrations were not only during the day but even at night with float processions and concerts performed by local Johor-born artists.

Sultan Ibrahim, accompanied by his consort Raja Zarith Sofia Sultan Idris Shah and their children, including the Tunku Mahkota of Johor, Tunku Ismail Sultan Ibrahim were present at most of the events.

Many locals were dazzled and marvelled with all the various activities and described the celebrations as

the grandest ever held in Bandar Maharani.

Visitor Kamariah Aripin, 23, said she was impressed with the cleanliness of the town with all the pre-war buildings painted with a fresh coat of paint along with newly resurfaced roads.

"This made the town look vibrant," she said, adding that her whole family came to Muar to take part in the festival.

Grandfather Jumlat Salleh, 64, who came with his three grandchildren, said he would take his grandchildren too to see the Sultan whenever there were Royal functions in town.

"They have to know who is their Ruler and are happy to be here during his historic event in Muar," said the retired soldier.

Meanwhile, prominent politician Tan Sri G. Pasamanikam regarded the celebration and the declaration of the royal town as appropriate and timely.

He said the late Almarhum Sultan Abu Bakar Sultan Ibrahim opened Bandar Maharani more than 125 years ago and it was among the most "well planned" town in the state.

He said the town had many beautifully designed old buildings such as the Sultan Ibrahim building, the Muar High School, the old police station, the old Muar court-



Grand do: Sultan Ibrahim cutting a cake at the high tea ceremony held at the Muar Stadium. With him are his consort Raja Zarith Sofia and their children.

house and the post office.

At the mammoth tea party at the Stadium Sultan Ibrahim on Thursday, thousands flocked to catch a glimpse of the ruler together with members of the royal family.

Local and foreign dignitaries

including Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's wife Ho Ching were present at the event.

Also present was Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman and his wife Datin Paduka Prof Dr Jamilah Ariffin.

The crowd was entertained by various cultural dances, band performance by the police and other performances.

There were also about 60 stalls serving various kinds of local delicacies and even fast food.



Happy faces: People waving flags at Jalan Arab leading to the Muar Stadium where the high tea celebration is being held.