NIBONG TEBAL

Joint ops turn fear into smiles

Operation 1Malaysia takes off with a friendly, light-hearted touch

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The initial fear and apprehension felt by restaurant patrons when they saw a group of uniformed personnel walking quickly towards them melted away when they were greeted by friendly smiles during a Operation 1Malaysia here.

Held every night, the 1Malaysia operation comprises officers from the police, Rela, the Civil Defence Department, Anti-Drug Agency, Registration Department, Prison Department and the Home Ministry's film censorship and enforcement body, said Seberang Perai Selatan (SPS) OCPD Supt Shafien Mamat.

Pre-university student Goi Choo Shieng said she imagined that something bad had happened and that was why the group of police and other enforcement officers arrived at the eatery at about 10pm on Tuesday night.

“I was a little scared because I thought something had happened but when I saw the policeman smile and extend his hand to shake mine, my fears went away. It is nice to know that policemen can be friendly, too,” said the 20-year-old.

Factory manager Ooi Guan Hai, 52, said the police force has come a long way from being stern to being accessible to the public.

“In the 1980s, when you saw the police, you’d run away because it meant trouble. Now, you can chat with them. I like how they seem more friendly now,” he added.

However, businessman Kalidas Ramasamy, 54, said the police should do more in curbing the problems involving migrant workers.

Universiti Sains Malaysia engineering student Fatin Athirah Azmi, 22, said she was ready to witness a swoop by the officers on an Internet café near the restaurant she was dining at.

“Instead, they came up to us and shook hands. This is less interesting because we wanted to see the police in action, but that’s alright.”

Held every night, the 1Malaysia operation is an integrated crime prevention action initiated by the Home Ministry and headed by the police.

“We started this operation on March 2 and it has been ongoing ever since. We also have another operation — Blue Ocean Strategy that is jointly organised by the army and us,” Shafien said.

These operations are deemed harmless because of the nature of surveillance which only sees uniform personnel smiling, greeting people and explaining their role in public. It has gained widespread approval from the public.

“The officers drive through neighbourhoods and stop in places where there are lots of people to greet. It is a two-way conversation because we ask their opinion or if they faced any problems.

“This way, not only do we have a presence in the public but we make people feel confident with us and encourage them to place their trust in us,” he added.

These strategies introduced under the Government Transformation Programme have seen a reduction in crime rate, particularly in semi-urban areas like Nibong Tebal, he added.