

'I Want To Touch A Dog' a big hit

BUILDING AWARENESS:

MAIS event aims to open up people's minds on how to treat dogs

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MORE than 1,500 people converged at the Central Park in Bandar Utama yesterday in a heartwarming display of tolerance and awareness about man's best friend.

The first-ever "I Want To Touch A Dog" event, held to promote understanding of canines and for some, overcome their fear of dogs, was sanctioned by the Selangor Islamic Religious Council (MAIS) and featured participants from all over the country, including Pahang and Sabah.

The two-hour event saw members of the public play and pose for photos with the dogs, while at the same time, mingling with the pet owners.

The event's organiser, Syed Azmi Alhabshi, said he did not like seeing how some Malaysians treated dogs and dog owners.

"I am used to seeing people shooing dogs away or throwing stones at them and I can't stand that. I wanted to bring Malaysians together and help them overcome their fear of dogs."

Syed Azmi said he had received some negative feedback for organising the event, but dismissed it as ignorance, adding that did not deter him from continuing with the event.

At the start of the event, a panel



Participants touching a Golden Retriever at the 'I Want To Touch A Dog' event at **Bandar Utama's Central Park**, Petaling Jaya, yesterday. Pic by Rosela Ismail

of speakers, including veterinarian Dr Hasnul Ismail, animal rescuer Muhamad Razeef Che Shamah, Muslim scholar Ustaz Iqbal Parjin and taxi driver Mohd Kamil Afendy Hasim shared their knowledge and personal experiences with participants.

Razeef offered his services for the seeing-eye dog-assisted blind community by allowing canines into his cab, something not usually

done by other taxi drivers.

Iqbal, who is from Islamic non-governmental organisation Pertubuhan Kesedaran Melayu dan Islam, said Islam did not teach its followers to hate dogs.

He said he was happy that so many people turned up to seek more knowledge and understanding about dogs.

Participants were also educated

on the proper way of conducting *sertu* (cleansing).

Universiti Putra Malaysia student Diyanah Mohkayat said the event was good as it allowed people to get closer to dogs, while educating them on the proper way to cleanse themselves.

Similarly, Nurul Badriah Abu Bakar said the event helped open up people's minds about approaching dogs.

"I am having lots of fun. I used to have so many questions about touching dogs and now that I know the proper way to cleanse myself and my clothes, I will not feel afraid to help dogs that are sick or injured."

Dog owner Sam Kok Hong lauded the event for increasing awareness among communities and promoting greater interfaith understanding.