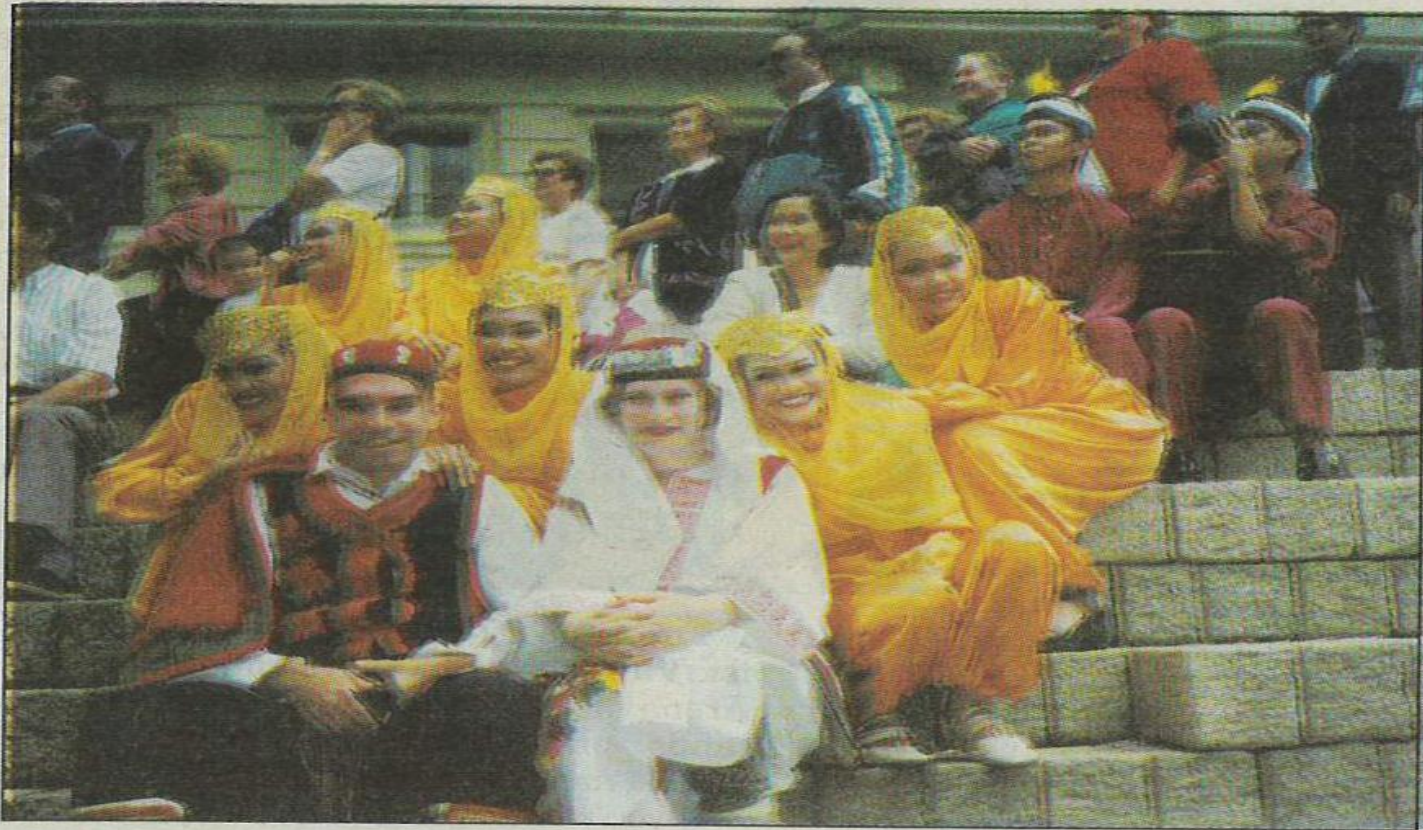


Dancing for ^{26/7/99} Spanish eyes THE STAR



The Malaysian dancers take time off for a snapshot with their Slovenian counterparts in between performances in Spain.

NINE dancers from the National Arts Academy or Akademi Seni Kebangsaan (ASK) represented Malaysia at a folk-dance festival called Folklorico International de Alava in Spain early this month.

The six-day event was held in towns around Madrid from July 6 to 11. The other participating countries at this inaugural event were the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Cameroon, Bulgaria, Hungary, Croatia and France.

Says Sulaiman Magi, who choreographed two of the modern dances: "The organisers picked Malaysia because ASK is well-known worldwide for its commitment to the arts."

All nine dancers are proud to have introduced Malaysia to other cultures. Although there was a language barrier between our Malaysian troupe and the Spanish audience, "they communicated with sign language, giving our local troupe the thumbs-up, literally," adds Sulaiman.

Dancer Rosmalinda Abu Samad says the Spaniards seemed fascinated with the hand, feet and eye movements. "They were really surprised by the indang dance, which had the

dancers sitting down."

The traditional dances presented in Spain were asyik, zafik, layang mas, daling daling, joget and indang. There were two modern versions of traditional dances (zapin kual and serkam 2) which were choreographed by Sulaiman.

Dancer Junainah M. Lojong observed that most traditional dances from the other countries had bigger and more aggressive movements compared with our relatively subtle movements.

Rizawati Razali concurs: "Our dances are closer to the earth while the other participating countries have more skyward 'jump-like' movements."

Another dancer, Saliza Ali, feels that besides being a cultural ambassador, the experience offered her a chance to perform in unlikely venues. "We performed everywhere — from the streets to badminton courts in villages."

Joseph Gonzales, head of ASK's dance department, explains: "Attending festivals is a crucial element in the promotion of the Malaysian arts. We are still behind Indonesia and Thailand in terms of international awareness and that's what the academy is working on." — **By Steven Patrick**