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15,000 throng Merdeka Square to watch parade

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ABOUT 15,000 people from all walks of life converged at Merdeka Square yesterday to celebrate Malaysia's 40th National Day which is themed "Virtuous Behaviour Towards a Successful Society".

The Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar and the Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Najihah, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Cabinet ministers and foreign diplomats were among those who witnessed a celebration of colour and pomp which was kicked off with a dance performance by primary school pupils.

The procession was led off with the Malaysian flag "Jalur Gemilang", and this was followed by contingents from government departments and agencies, the private sector, political parties and uniformed bodies. Similar celebrations were held throughout the country.

Dr Mahathir was greeted by a loud applause when he sprang a surprise, arriving in a red Perodua Kancil bearing registration number Perodua 1001 with his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

Also present at the celebrations were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and his wife Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Ismail, Culture and Arts Minister Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik, who is also chairman of the National Day parade committee.

Children made themselves comfortable by sitting along Jalan Raja and Jalan Raja Laut. Others were seen perched on the shoulders of the adults with many having arrived in the wee hours of the morning to pick choice spots to view the celebrations.

While some cheered at the contingents as well as the fly-past by the Royal Malaysia Air Force (RMAF), a few were unable to stand the crowd and humidity and had to be given first aid.

More than 1,000 students displayed various attractive field performances, including the formation of the National Day Logo and the Kuala Lumpur Tower using blue, red and yellow flags.

Preceding the procession was a performance of the 1996 and 1997 National Day theme by the Sri Kota Teacher Training College choir accompanied by the Royal Police band.

The one and a half hour long procession participated by more than 10,000 people clad in their respective department or company uniforms was an added attraction to the festive atmosphere that prevailed at the Square.

Some of the 116 contingents on foot wore uniforms with the colours of "Jaluran Gemilang" blended with silver, gold and metallic green in Malay traditional costume complete with headgear.

There were also some 22 vehicle contingents which included mounted police on horses of Pakistani, Australian and Argentine breed.

The horses together with the police dogs comprising Alsations, Labradors and Golden Retrievers were certainly favourites with the crowd, with many of the people standing on their toes to get a better view.

The RMAF's state-of-the-art acquisitions - F/A-18 Hornets, MiG-29N Fulcrums and Hawk fighter jets - took advantage of the fine weather to make a fly-past while the vehicle contingents were marching past the parade ground.

Bernama reports: Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik said he was satisfied with the 40th National Day parade which went on smoothly without any hitches this morning.

He said Dr Mahathir also expressed satisfaction with the conduct of the

parade.

Sabbaruddin thanked all parties, including the police and the armed forces, for their cooperation in ensuring the success of the parade.

"The participants showed high spirit. The performance of one or two contingents was not that satisfactory yesterday (Saturday) but they continued to train to tie up the loose ends to put up an impressive performance," he said.

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