

Patriotism and unity prevail as nation turns 41

By JONATHAN KWOK

31-9-98

PENANG: The spirit of patriotism and unity clearly prevailed over the economic gloom as Malaysians turned up in full force to celebrate the 41st National Day yesterday.

Aptly themed *Our Country, Our Responsibility*, this year's celebrations drove home the point that the fate of the country lay in the hands of every Malaysian.

Even the rain, which fell at the end of the two-hour celebrations, failed to dampen the spirits of the people who were united by a common bond - a sense of love and pride for their country.

From the groups of youths who camped overnight outside the Universiti Sains Malaysia grounds to those who arrived as early as 5am to witness the parade, Malaysians have clearly demonstrated their love for the country even during the difficult times.

Despite the overcast sky, a burning sense of anticipation filled the crowd, numbering tens of thousands, as they lined up along Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah and its adjoining roads to witness the celebrations hosted by Penang for the first time.

The parade kicked off after the arrival of the

● TURN TO PAGE THREE

8,000 take part in colourful 2km march past

31-9-98

● FROM PAGE ONE

Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar and the Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Najihah at about 8am.

Earlier, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali arrived at the VIP grandstand in a brand-new metallic green Perodua Kembara.

Also present were Cabinet ministers, including Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu and Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh'Tsu Koon.

After *Negaraku* was played, the King inspected the guard of honour, following which a formation of six Royal Malaysian Air Force helicopters, each bearing the national flag, flew overhead, leaving a trail of red, yellow and blue smoke.

The *Jalur Gemilang* was then hoisted in front of the VIP grandstand as the Penang Teachers Training College choir sang the national anthem.

Seven students, led by Ridzal Dzulkifli, 19, from Penang Free School, recited the *Rukunegara*, after which shouts of "Merdeka!" reverberated three times across the field.

The patriotic poem *Junjung Pusaka Watan Merdeka* by Marzuki Ali was

then jointly recited by Maarof Seman, champion of last year's National Day poetry competition and USM student Ng Paik Kheng.

Later, 2,750 students brightly dressed in the colours of the Malaysian flag performed a *senam-robik* field presentation during which various "human formations," including the Malaysian flag and National Day logo, were recreated.

This was followed by a traditional dance performance in front of the VIP grandstand.

As the sound of distant drums and brass bands approached in a thundering crescendo, all attention was focussed on the colourful march past consisting of 7,972 participants from 67 contingents and 26 brass bands.

Wave after wave of smartly attired Malaysians representing various schools, companies, organisations and government departments marched proudly down the 2km road while the crowd cheered them on.

The finale came as two squadrons of F-18 Hornets and Hawks roared into view and gave a dazzling aerobatics display, making a deafening low-altitude streak towards the VIP stand before pulling up in a vertical climb which drew gasps of amazement from the spectators.