

31 AUG 1998

Merdeka-Celebrations (Round-up)

ECONOMIC DOWNTURN STRENGTHENS SPIRIT OF PATRIOTISM

PULAU PINANG, Aug 31 (Bernama) -- Malaysians today celebrated the 41st National Day with joy and patriotism undaunted by the country 's economic downturn.

That spirit was visible on the faces of thousands of people who watched the National Day parade at Padang Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) here.

Rain which fell at the end of the two-hour colourful celebrations did not dampen the spirit of the people who considered it as showers of blessing on the land they loved.

People of all age groups and from all walks of life also lined the Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah to watch the parade which began at 8am.

The Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar Almarhun Tuanku Abdul Rahman and the Raja Permaisuri Agong Tunku Najihah Tunku Besar Burhanuddin, Penang Yang Dipertua Negeri Tun Dr Hamdan Sheikh Tahir and his wife Toh Puan Siti Zainab Baharuddin watched the parade from the Royal Dais.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon and Cabinet Ministers were among the large number of dignitaries present.

Dr Mahathir drove to the padang in the "Kembara", the four-wheel drive built by Malaysia's second national car manufacturing company Perodua.

Among the eye-catching events at the celebrations were the smart march-past by Royal Malay Regiment soldiers, the air show and fly-past by RMAF fighter planes and helicopters which flew the Jalur Gemilang as well as the King's inspection of the Royal Malaysian Navy honour guard.

A total of 7,972 people in vivid-colour clothing from 67 contingents and 27 band groups took part in the march-past.

The Chingay Pulau Pinang dance troupe performed in front of the royal dais before the march past led by high-powered motorcycles began and at the tail end of the march past were heavy military vehicles.

"The celebrations were cheerful despite the economic slowdown ," said Nadia Rosli, 23, a Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) student.

"In the past we have to be satisfied watching it all on TV but this year the whole family came to the padang as the celebrations are being held here," Lim Teck Choon, 30, of Kulim, Kedah, said.

The theme of the 41st National Day celebrations is "Our Country, Our Responsibility."

In line with the theme, the Prime Minister in his National Day message urged the people to collaborate with the government to revive the economy and defend the country's independence and sovereignty.

"Malaysians should accept the fact that they have a responsibility to preserve and manage their country," he said in the message carried over radio and television.

The celebrations in fact began at midnight at Padang Kota Lama here where the Prime Minister joined the people in proclaiming "Merdeka, Malaysia Can". The Jalur Gemilang was hoisted at the stroke of midnight to the strains of the Negara Ku.

In KUCHING, more than 7,000 people gathered at Padang Merdeka for the celebrations. Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud, Deputy Chief Minister Tan Sri Alfred Jabu and State Ministers were among the dignitaries present.

The Chief Minister raised the Jalur Gemilang and the Sarawak flag at the celebrations.

There were field shows and poetry recitation by Zakaria Abdul Manan who emerged as the state level champion poet in a competition held in conjunction with the National Day celebrations.

In KOTA KINABALU, more than 3,000 people from 50 contingents representing various departments and organisations took part in a march-past which began at 7.30am and ended at Padang Bandaran at 9.30am.

Sabah Yang Dipertua Negeri Tun Haji Sakaran Dandai took the salute at the march-past and also inspected a honour guard mounted by 103 officers and men of the Third Battalion Royal Malay Regiment under the command of Mejar Mohd Rozi Razak.

Sabah Chief Minister Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, State Ministers and foreign consuls were among the dignitaries present.

In KUANTAN, some 10,000 people gathered at the Kuantan Municipal Council padang for the National Day celebrations.

The Regent of Pahang inspected an honour guard and witnessed the hoisting of the Jalur Gemilang and cultural shows performed by the various communities.

Pahang Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob was among the dignitaries present.

In KOTA BAHARU, 10,000 people led by Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat attended the National Day celebrations at the Stadium Sultan Mohamad IV.

The celebrations coincided with the Commonwealth Games Baton Run. Former national athletes Hashim Mustapa and Nik Fauzi Hassan led the Baton run accompanied by an antic motorcycle squad and a mounted unit.

Nik Fauzi handed the baton to Nik Abdul Aziz who passed it on to State Secretary Datuk Wan Hashim Wan Daud for the run to Terengganu.

The National Day celebrations included a march-past in which 2,000 people from 90 contingents representing the public and private sectors, police and the military took part.

The celebrations included nasyid and silat presentations.

In KUALA TERENGGANU, more than 10,000 people attended the National Day celebrations at the Sultan Ismail Nasiruddin Shah Stadium. The Sultan of Terengganu and Terengganu Permaisuri Nur Zaharah and Menteri Besar Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad were among the dignitaries present.

The Sultan inspected a guard of honour mounted by members of the 18th Battalion Royal Malay Regiment.

Wan Mokhtar raised the Jalur Gemilang and joined in the rendition of the Negara Ku.

In KANGAR, more than 2,000 people took part in a march past at the Padang Majlis Perbandaran Kangar.

The Raja and Raja Puan Muda of Perlis took the salute and reviewed the march past. Also present was Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim.

In ALOR SETAR, about 3,000 people led by the Sultan and Raja Muda of Kedah attended the Kedah-level celebrations at Stadium Darul Aman. Also present was Menteri Besar Tan Sri Sanusi Junid.

The Sultan took the salute and inspected the parade mounted by 122 contingents representing various departments and uniformed bodies.

In IPOH, 64 contingents comprising representatives of government agencies, the private sector and schools joined in a march-past at Dataran Bangunan Perak Darul Ridzuan, the newly completed government office complex.

Sultan Azlan Shah, the Raja Perempuan of Perak Tuanku Bainun and Menteri Besar Tan Sri Ramli Ngah Talib and his wife Puan Sri Raja Noora Ashikin Raja Abdullah were present.

In JOHOR, the state level celebrations were centered in the coastal tourist town of Mersing about 136KM from Johor Baharu. The celebrations

began at 6.30pm yesterday with the tahlil and religious talk at Masjid Jamek in Mersing.

At night various cultural displays were held at Dataran Sri Mersing and after midnight a decorated boat floats procession was held.

This morning a march-past was held at the Mersing Mini-Stadium in which more than 7,000 people from all walks of life took part.

Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, state executive councillors and heads of department were present.

In his speech, Abdul Ghani urged the people to defend the sovereignty of the country which was facing an economic slowdown.

"Our struggle should be based on wisdom, consensus, unity and partnership to find a way out of the economic slowdown," he added.

--BERNAMA

TEAM NZ ZKS AAM