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Games spirit comes alive at carnival

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The spirit of the Commonwealth Games came alive on the streets of Bangsar tonight as throngs of Malaysians and visitors came to soak in the carnival atmosphere and to catch a glimpse of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

A trendy nightspot for party-goers, the area was transformed into a family-oriented venue where people - both young and old, and from far and near - came to be a part of the 16th Commonwealth Games Bangsar Carnival.

Balloons, banners and Commonwealth Games paraphernalia that were hung at most outlets, and the people, brought a riot of colour and activity to the Bangsar Baru business area.

Even the evening drizzle did little to dampen the spirit of the huge crowds from slowly trickling in as early as 7.30pm.

When Dr Mahathir arrived at 9pm, he was greeted by loud cheers from the crowd, a Bhangra dance, and a lion dance.

The Prime Minister, himself soaking in the ambience of the carnival, spoke to the crowd in a light-hearted fashion, before he set scores of balloons free to mark the launch of the carnival.

In a donation drive, Dr Mahathir secured a total of RM530,340 for the Games from 26 companies and organisations.

Later, he walked through the fun-filled streets of Bangsar, visiting the stalls, before officially opening a police beat opposite the Jolly Green Giant hawker centre.

Sheerin Khan, a resident of Bangsar Baru, one of the early birds at the carnival, said she had just come to "check out the sights" and see what the carnival was all about.

"It looks like it's going to be fun with all that they have planned for the evening," she said, adding that this was a great idea to bring people together to celebrate the coming Games.

The excitement of getting to see Dr Mahathir in person was evident.

There were also large banners proclaiming a warm welcome for the Prime Minister and his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali.

Student Ng Eng Tat, 20, of Bukit Bandaraya, was waiting near fast-food outlet McDonalds to "actually see him", while HELP College student Melissa Seng, 19, of Kepong, came "to get the Prime Minister's autograph".

Others who turned up included Kam and family from Bukit Indah, Ampang, who decided to stop by as they were in the vicinity.

They were a few hundred who sat along the extensions of restaurants and pubs or browsed through Games' souvenirs at the stalls.

Food outlets had special promotions. Turkish restaurant Bazaar was offering its Donor Duru specialty at a mere RM6 compared to its usual RM18.80, while Bud's Ice Cream Cafe gave free samples of its 40 flavours of ice-cream.

Not to be outdone was decoration outlet The House Shop, whose owner Pauline Liu turned make-up artist for the day.

She was seen offering to paint the Commonwealth Games logo on the face for RM5 or animal features for RM10.

A hair salon also offered a 20 per cent discount for haircuts for the day.

Other highlights of the evening, hosted by Mahadzir Lokman and Nancy Yeoh, included performances by a lion dance troupe, a Bhangra group and the Rakan Muda brass Band.

Strains of My Way, Macarena, the Samba and Swing The Mood from a live band greeted the Prime Minister.

Jalan Telawi Dua, one of four roads closed, was also known as Sukom Lane because of the large number of stalls offering Games paraphernalia.

T-shirts, caps, bags and pouches were the most popular items, seeing brisk sales.

"We have a mixed crowd here, including those from the upper class who are buying our branded T-shirts," said Sukom Ninety Eight Berhad's events communications manager Stanley Louis.

As sales were brisk, the stalls might remain open after midnight, he said.

Proceeds from promotional offers of the various outlets would go towards buying Games tickets for the underprivileged, while the carnival was also aimed at promoting ticket sales for the Games.

It was jointly organised by the Youth and Sports Ministry, the office of Lembah Pantai Member of Parliament Datuk Shahrizat Jalil, the Bangsar Baru Business Council and residents associations in the area.

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