

01/09/1998

Malaysians celebrate N-Day with gusto despite downturn

A. Kathirasen

PENANG, Mon. - The main National Day celebrations today, held in Penang for the first time, were so spirited and full of colour, music and merriment, that it was as if there were no economic problems.

The faces of the tens of thousands of people who thronged the Universiti Sains Malaysia grounds, forming a 3km human chain along Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah to watch the parade, reflected only pride and joy.

The parade itself went like clockwork and won much praise for its "Malaysianess".

There were loud cheers when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad drove in in a Perodua Kembara with Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

The celebrations began when Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar and Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Najihah arrived. The first item was the King's inspection of the guard of honour mounted by 105 men of the Royal Malaysian Navy under the command of Lt-Kdr Ahmad Lahmi Abdullah.

The Malaysian flag was hoisted, followed by a fly-past by six helicopters of the Royal Malaysian Air Force, army and navy.

A choir of 200 trainees from the Federal Teachers Training College accompanied by the Royal Malaysian Police band performed the Negaraku.

The oath was read by 2,750 pupils from 22 secondary schools, led by seven pupils of different races, representing the Malaysian people. This was followed by three shouts of "Merdeka".

National poetry recital competition winner Maarof Serman, USM student Ng Phaik Kheng and journalist Claudia Theophilus, then read out a poem on their love for the country by poet Marzuki Ali.

Dances, pattern formation and aerobics performances by the 2,750 pupils added more colour. The pupils formed patterns of the National Day logo, the Penang Bridge and the national flag.

The parade then began, with 7,525 participants and the celebrations culminated in an aerial display by four Hornet and four Hawk fighter jets. As the people dispersed after the parade, they carried with them the spirit of Malaysia Boleh.

(END)