

01/01/2000

A rapturous welcome (HL)

YEAR 2000 is here! The new millennium arrived in Malaysia at midnight to a tremendous welcome of dazzling fireworks and joyous noise of Malaysians celebrating with gusto around the country.

It was celebration everywhere with public squares and parks turning into open parties, the excitement growing as the clock ticked closer to midnight and the 20th century melted away.

Thousands poured into the streets and a carnival spirit kept the night going right from dusk when the sun set on this century.

The focal celebration point in the capital city was the Kuala Lumpur City Centre and Dataran Merdeka, not forgetting the many street parties, both impromptu and organised.

The old airport at Subang in Petaling Jaya became a giant party zone. The new Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang did not miss out on the fun as it too hosted a rooftop party.

The people packed the Esplanade and Batu Ferringhi in Penang for a beach party, they filled Dataran Ipoh in Perak as they did all other public areas in the other towns.

Nightspots everywhere were, of course, packed to the gills with revellers despite the high cover charges.

The country's leaders - the Prime Minister and his Cabinet - joined in the celebrations at KLCC where Year 2000 rolled in in truly grand style.

There was hardly room to move as thousands crowded the park to bask in the fairyland atmosphere, to be entertained by singers and a laser show as they bade farewell to 1999.

At the stroke of midnight, fireworks whizzed into the sky, filling the night with a glorious blaze of sparkling colours and deafening explosions.

The world's tallest buildings, the Petronas Twin Towers, provided a perfect backdrop for Malaysia's welcome to a bright future.

In Penang, a grand fireworks display lighted up the skies in a 10-minute spectacular performance at the Esplanade.

Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon was also in the thick of things - laying the foundation stone for the Millennium Monument for the State's time capsule project and then launching the Penang Lions Clubs' "Light of Hope" project in aid of the poor.

Participants in the charity project made their way through a 76-metre-long maze armed with luminous light sticks sold at RM1 each.

Adding colour to the celebrations were cultural performances at Little India and Campbell Street pedestrian mall. Among the reverberating performances at the newly-reopened mall was a 24-drum performance.

In the midst of celebrations, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad urged Malaysians to close ranks.

In his traditional New Year message televised tonight, he said Malaysians should welcome the new millennium with joy but should not forget the lessons of history.

Thanking God for the New Year, he said this year was special because it marked the beginning of a new century and new millennium - the 21st century and third millennium.

Malaysia entered into the new millennium six hours after the tiny South Pacific island nation of Kiribati set off the celebrations around the world.

Later in the evening, Dr Mahathir and wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah

Mohamed Ali joined tens of thousands of Malaysians in ushering in the new millennium.

Dr Mahathir and Siti Hasmah attended the Bintang Millennium celebration organised by the YTL Group along Jalan Bukit Bintang.

Revellers had started swarming the area as early as 7pm.

Jalan Bukit Bintang, which was closed to traffic, was packed with those who had turned up to join in the celebration.

The Prime Minister, who arrived at 10.30pm, wished the people a happy new year and hoped they would enjoy and celebrate in a peaceful manner.

In a brief speech, Dr Mahathir said he was happy to see many city folk and foreigners taking part in the celebration.

"I'm very pleased to see so many city dwellers gathered here to welcome the new year, the new century and the new millennium."

An outdoor musical extravaganza featuring world-famous soloists Michael Ball and Gillian Humphreys along with the Italian Symphonic Orchestra and local singers, including Zainal Abidin, kept the crowd entertained.

Among those present was YTL managing director Tan Sri Francis Yeoh.

Dr Mahathir later joined the people for a countdown at KLCC at about 11pm.

As soon as the clock struck 12, the sky above KLCC burst in a dazzling display of fireworks which lasted for about five minutes.

(END)