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Merdeka celebrations commence

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The month-long 43rd Merdeka celebrations kicked off today with colourful events like parades, runs and gatherings in public squares around the country.

The celebrations, to run until Sept 16, also included a campaign to get Malaysians to fly the Jalur Gemilang.

The main celebrations was launched in a lively ceremony by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at Dataran Merdeka.

In Kuching, Sarawak kicked off its celebration with a gathering of 5,000 people at Padang Merdeka and a run led by Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud to parade the national flag through the city's main streets.

Taib said many Malaysians tend to take their good lives for granted and forget how fortunate they are.

In Kuala Terengganu, Menteri Besar Abdul Hadi Awang urged Malaysians to free themselves from negative thinking inherited from past colonialists.

According to him, the minds of Malaysians were still colonised despite the country having achieved independence more than four decades ago.

"Cultures which are colonial legacies can be just as destructive unless we are willing to reject them," he said.

More than 2,000 people, including state executive councillors and senior government officers, attended the function at the Sultan Ismail Nasiruddin Shah Stadium.

In Johor Baru, 2,000 people participated in the 3.3km Larian Bendera which was flagged off by Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman who also joined in the run.

The participants included representatives from government departments and agencies, non-governmental organisations, corporate bodies, students and the public.

The run flagged off from Dataran Bandaraya.

In Kota Kinabalu, the Untuk Mu Malaysia run will be launched tomorrow by State Youth, Culture and Sports Development Minister Datuk Rubin Balang while in Tawau, the Motothon Jalur Gemilang will take off.

Seventy-seven vehicles will be used to distribute the national and state flags.

For their part, main shopping centres in the state capital - the Wisma Merdeka, Wawasan Plaza and Karamunsing Shopping complex - are being used for the month-long Merdeka Month Exhibition.

In Kota Baru, about 3,000 people attended the celebration at Stadium Sultan Mohamad IV today.

Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat launched the event which included traditional performances like the dikir barat and an air show.

Nik Aziz said individuals should be patriotic and show their love for the country.

"They should take part in the celebration to show that they are part of the nation," he said.

In Penang, Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon launched the celebrations at the Esplanade by flagging off a group of flag-bearers who will bring the flags to the various districts in the State.

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