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Thousands usher in National Day joy with shouts of `Merdeka`

SHAH ALAM, Wed. - Sharp at midnight, shouts of "Merdeka" rang out across the nation, with millions of people from all walks of life and racial backgrounds ushering in the 43rd National Day celebrations in the true spirit of patriotism.

The spirit of festivity was evident during the national-level National Day celebrations at Dataran Shah Alam tonight.

The highlight of the celebrations was the countdown which started with the arrival of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at 11.20pm, accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Ministers, and other dignitaries.

At the stroke of midnight, Dr Mahathir shouted "Merdeka" seven times, echoed by a huge crowd.

This was followed by the hoisting of the Jalur Gemilang by members of armed forces.

A choir group sang several patriotic songs including the Jalur Gemilang and Keranamu Malaysia (Because of You Malaysia).

Then this was followed by a 10-minute fireworks display.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir, his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali and Abdullah attended a state banquet at the Dewan Jubilee Perak here.

The Regent of Selangor Tengku Idris Shah was present.

The celebration started with various programmes and activities lined up for the event. Menteri Besar Dr Mohd Khir Toyo launched it at the same venue at 5.45pm.

Among the activities were cultural performances of various races, traditional games, and songs by veteran singers including Datuk S.M. Salim, Yusni Hamid, Datin Orchid Abdullah, Rosiah Chik and Ahmad Jais.

There were also shows by the various races at shopping complexes such as keroncong in Plaza Shah Alam, dondang sayang at Alam Sentral and wayang kulit at the PKNS complex.

A pantomime to reenact the struggle which led to the achievement of Independence was led by veteran actor/director Datuk Jins Shamsuddin.

Cultural dances were also performed by Malay dancers, and also dancers from the Temple of Fine Arts.

The crowd was also entertained to a concert performed by several popular artistes such as Siti Nurhaliza, Elaine Kang, Ahmad Jais, Yusni Hamid, Noraniza Idris, Ziana Zain and the Raihan nasyid group.

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