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A great show on 44th N-Day

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Malaysians gathered at Dataran Merdeka to celebrate the 44th National Day by tracing the nation's history from being an agricultural colony to a modern country on its way to full-fledged industrialisation.

Thousands of people, including tourists, packed the pavements along Jalan Raja since early morning to get a good view of this year's parade, which centred on the theme "Industrialisation".

The overall theme for National Day is Keranamu Malaysia (For You, Malaysia).

"The 'industrialisation' theme was chosen for the parade to tell Malaysia's success story in manufacturing and industry, which is our biggest foreign exchange earner," Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir said after the parade.

More than 11,500 people participated in the parade. They included uniformed bodies, schoolchildren, security personnel, corporations and industrial workers.

The floats were eagerly anticipated by the crowd which began to spill out onto the road in some areas.

The 13 floats were all from corporate entities. Many were designed to reflect their particular industrial activity.

The Kentucky Fried Chicken float bore giant chickens with singing children.

The Sapura float carried a giant fax machine and the DRB-Hicom contingent dressed up in shiny "spacesuits" bearing the colours of the Malaysian flag.

There was also a motorcade comprising the newer range of Proton cars, from the Satria and Waja to the recently-launched Juara and Kelisa.

The march-past was also a showcase of the institutions that had contributed to the nation's independence, peace and security.

Contingents included the ex-servicemen's and ex-policemen's associations, the Royal Malaysian Air Force, the army, the Special Malaysian Rescue Team (SMART), and the Fire and Rescue Department.

The morning had dawned with a slightly overcast sky and a cool breeze, bringing much relief to the waiting crowd.

Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah and the Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Siti Aishah arrived at 8.30am.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali arrived in a maroon-coloured Proton Kelisa at 8.20am.

The crowd cheered when they realised that Dr Mahathir was driving the vehicle instead of being chauffeured.

Also present were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, his wife Datin Seri Endon Mahmood, Cabinet Ministers and their deputies, foreign dignitaries and VIPs.

As the national anthem was sung, helicopters roared overhead in a fly-past, releasing coloured smoke.

The Rukunegara was then recited, followed by seven hearty shouts of Merdeka! led by a group of schoolchildren of different races.

The crowd then listened to a passionate delivery of the poem Keranamu Malaysia which was punctuated by cannon blasts.

Everyone then turned his attention to a big video screen which showed the human formations taking place on the field.

Some 2,300 students from Federal Territory primary and secondary schools were involved in the field formations, which creatively depicted Malaysia in her pre-Independence days, the transition to manufacturing and the present cyber-age.

The students executed a moving gearwheel formation to symbolise industrial activity and a satellite formation to show the information technology age. They also formed the Jalur Gemilang and Keranamu Malaysia words and logo.

Accompanying the formations was the hypnotic rhythm of ethnic drums played by 1,200 drummers from the Malaysian Folk Drum Symphony.

The symphony comprises drums used by the Malays, Chinese, Indians and indigenous people.

The drums, their individual sounds and their players marked the country's racial diversity - a symbol of how such variety melds together in a powerful rhythm when played in harmony.

Even after the celebration ended at 11am, the symphony continued to entertain crowds of on-lookers who were clearly fascinated with the drummers' synchronised movements and the spell-binding beat.

Royal Malaysian Air Force fighters screamed overhead at the closing of the event as everyone sang the Jalur Gemilang patriotic song.

Later, Kadir said he was pleased with the crowd's turnout and noted that many had brought flags along to show their patriotism.

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