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Grand festivities throughout nation

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THE first national day of the millennium on Aug 31 last year was celebrated with much pomp and grandeur at the newly proclaimed Shah Alam city, and was a showcase of the people's unity.

The 43rd National Day celebration was attended by some 100,000 people from all walks of life, including a sizeable number of tourist, turning up from early morning at the Merdeka Esplanade in Shah Alam.

The King, the Raja Permaisuri Agong together with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Cabinet ministers attended the celebration.

As proof that the love for the nation transcends political affiliation, Pas president Datuk Fadzil Noor and DAP vice-chairman and Kepong MP Dr Tan Seng Giaw joined in the festivities.

Dr Mahathir and his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali arrived at 7.45am shortly after the Cabinet Ministers, dignitaries and VIPs had gathered.

The Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah and the Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Siti Aishah arrived soon after to witness the march past and performances put up by the 11,000 strong contingent.

The day's programme began about 8am with singing of the Negaraku accompanied by music played by the Royal Malaysian Air Force band.

Shouts of "Merdeka!" and "Malaysia Boleh" was followed by the recitation of the poem Keranamu Malaysia by a multi-racial group comprising five secondary school pupils chosen from across the country. Institut Bahasa Melayu Malay-sia students sang two new patriotic songs - Jalur Gemilang and Keranamu Malaysia.

This was followed by a colourful field performance by some 2,400 schoolchildren from 13 schools in red, blue, white and yellow costumes as well as various national dresses like the baju kebaya.

The parade began and among the highlights were the showcase by the agricultural sector contingent which saw participants trooping in farming and fishing gear.

There were also modern agriculturalists, complete with mock notebook computers and handphones.

Among the floats in the procession, the most outstanding was that of the Malaysia Book of Records which featured the nation's tallest man and woman measuring 2.4m and 2.1m respectively. It was pulled by Malaysia's strongman P. Letchemanah.

Other highlights included the appearance of then newly-launched Proton Waja and the Bufori sportscar.

Also unforgettable were the impressive march-pasts by various bands as well as the contingents of interest such as Kejayaan Malaysia, Persatuan Anak-anak Merdeka and the Malaysian Humanitarian Foundation.

Crowning the day's events were the impressive aerial displays by the Royal Malaysian Air Force's latest jetfighters - the MiG-29 Fulcrum and the F/A-18 Hornet - and helicopters emitting coloured smoke and carrying the Jalur Gemilang.

Other States were not left behind and also held their own State-level celebrations.

The most "colourful" of these was said to be one at Alor Star where the political divide was bridged with State Assemblymen from both Pas and Barisan Nasional marching side-by-side for the first time.

Present were the Sultan of Kedah and Raja Muda, accompanied by Menteri

Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain.

In Kangar, Perlis, a three-mile parade by over 20,000 people from 114 contingents walked through the State capital.

The celebrations were officiated by the new Raja of Perlis at 8am.

The National Day celebrations in Johor were held at Kota Tinggi with more than 10,000 people lining the streets near Dataran Kota to witness the march-past by 2,188 participants who walked 1.6km clad in colourful costumes.

The celebrations were officiated by Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman.

In Kuala Terengganu, celebrations included a 100-strong contingent which for the first time included members of Pas, Parti Keadilan Nasional and DAP parading in shirts and T-shirts decorated with their party logos.

In Kuantan, the Tengku Mahkota of Pahang and Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob joined about 10,000 people at the Kuantan Municipal Council field for the State-level celebrations.

The highlight was a parade of 83 contingents comprising 8,000 people who marched to the rhythm of patriotic songs.

In Penang, the Yang di-Pertua Negeri Tun Hamdan Sheikh Tahir, his consort Toh Puan Siti Zainab Baharuddin and Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon were among about 1,000 people who attended the celebration at the Esplanade.

The Merdeka parade comprised 79 contingents with 5,547 participants, including 41 from the Government departments, agencies and statutory bodies, 11 companies, 17 school bands and 10 uniformed bodies and voluntary organisations.

In Malacca, 80 contingents took part in the parade held at Padang Pahlawan in Bandar Hilir, witnessed by some 5,000 people.

Guests at the celebration included the Yang di-Pertua Negeri Tun Syed Ahmad Shahabuddin and wife Toh Puan Marfuzah Sheikh Mohd Osman, Chief Minister Datuk Wira Mohd Ali Mohd Rustam, State Speaker Datuk Amid Nordin and several State Executive Councillors.

In Kota Baru, the celebrations began with a parade involving 100 contingents comprising 4,000 participants from various agencies.

Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat and his deputy Abdul Halim Abdul Rahman were among the State VIPs who watched the parade at the Sultan Muhammad IV Stadium.

The parade started from the State Government administrative office complex, Kota Darul Naim at Jalan Kuala Krai, about 3.8km from the stadium.

In Ipoh, the Merdeka celebration held in front of Ipoh Town Hall at Jalan Panglima Bukit Gantang Wahab was a refreshing change from previous celebrations as it included a float procession.

In Seremban, more than 15,000 people gathered at the town centre to witness the Merdeka parade.

The contingents paid their respects to the acting Yang di-Pertuan Besar Negeri Sembilan Tunku Naquiddin Tuanku Ja'afar and Tunku Puan Muda, Tunku Nurul Hayati Tunku Bahador.

In Sarawak, the Yang di-Pertua Negeri Tun Ahmad Zaidi Adruce Mohammed Noor and wife Toh Puan Sumiati joined more than 5,000 people at the celebrations in Miri. Also present were Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud and Sarawak Cabinet ministers.

In Kota Kinabalu, more than 10,000 gathered at Padang Merdeka to participate in the State-level celebration that included a parade by 60 contingents.

Among those present were Yang di-Pertua Negeri Tun Sakaran Dandai, his wife Toh Puan Rukaiyah Datuk Abdullah, Chief Minister Datuk Seri Osu Sukam

and State Cabinet Ministers.

Whatever the situation maybe in the other areas, the National Day remains a gaily celebrated event that never fails to draw out hundreds of thousands of Malaysians across the country each year.