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Happy New Year (HL)

YEAR 2001 arrived in Malaysia to a grand welcome of fireworks, noise and music as people around the country stayed up late to greet the third millennium.

Malaysians may have joined the world in ushering in Year 2000 as the "new" millennium last year, but it didn't stop them from having a gala time again to welcome the real thing.

Purists insist that Jan 1, 2001, is actually the real beginning of the third millennium and 21st century.

Public squares, nightspots and streets around the country were packed with party-goers who began their countdown vigil from dusk. As the sun set on Year 2000, the party spirit kicked into high gear.

Concerts and entertainment shows in most major towns kept the carnival spirit going.

As the clock ticked closer to midnight, excitement heightened with the traditional countdown. The clock struck 12, and shouts of Happy New Year filled the air as fireworks whizzed into the sky.

In the capital city, revellers made it standing-room only at all celebration points. There was barely room to move at the KLCC Park beneath the Petronas Twin Towers, Bintang Walk and Bangsar.

The Twin Towers provided a glittering backdrop to a death-defying skydive jump which gripped the crowds who waited hours to watch it.

They were joined by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali who arrived at KLCC at 11.05pm.

The skydivers landed on the dot of 12.01am into the new millennium to applause as the sky above burst into dazzling colours of fireworks.

At Bintang Walk, it was an elegant show of three tenors - Warren Mok, Alberto Cupido and Gegam Grigorian - singing excerpts of Italian operas.

The appreciative crowd was joined by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his wife Datin Seri Endon Mahmood. Abdullah took centre stage to lead the countdown.

The Prime Minister, who made a quick stop here before heading to the KLCC, wished the people a happy and prosperous New Year.

"Everybody thought they had ushered in the new millennium at the end of last year, but in actual fact we are only about to enter it.

"Anyway, it is a good excuse to have a celebration. This time we are celebrating the real 21st century," he joked to loud cheers from the crowd.

Up north, Penang greeted the New Year with the traditional booming of ship and ferry horns, and a fireworks show at the Esplanade. The City Bayview Hotel added colour to the night by dropping 2001 balloons off its rooftop.