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Thousands usher in the New Year - the Malaysian way

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Glittering fireworks, bright lights and delectable food were part of a massive celebration at Dataran Merdeka today where thousands ushered in the New Year - Malaysian style.

A Christmas-Hari Raya-New Year "open house" of mammoth proportions, Pancawarna Malaysia, saw the traditional gathering spot come alive.

The year 2002 was welcomed by almost 200,000 revellers, who had earlier feasted on roti jala, lemang, nasi lemak, soto, nasi beriani and acar.

The sizzling heat in the afternoon and subsequent rain as the sun set did not stop the masses from enjoying themselves, and the lively open house atmosphere during the day was matched by the night time bazaar-like festivities.

The four-hour feeding frenzy began at 3pm where long queues quickly formed at stalls, and people ate anywhere they could sit. The organisers' earlier plan for the public to bersila and eat was thwarted by the blazing sun.

Some five tonnes of nasi beriani and 120,000 cups of teh tarik, supplied by Persatuan Restoran Muslim Malaysia, and more than 6,000 cups of root beer provided by A&W, were guzzled down quickly.

Volunteers also brought lemang, rendang, mee soto, 1,000 packs of nasi lemak and cookies that were served earlier in the morning and afternoon.

By 5pm, cooler weather settled in and more people moved on to the grass, though a slight drizzle followed soon after.

Local stars including Nora, Hattan, Maya Karin and Rabbani performed popular numbers. There were also bhangra, lion dance and ghazal performances.

The performances carried on till midnight, when Deputy Information Minister Datuk Mohd Khalid Mohd Yunus counted down with the crowd and fireworks lit the sky for 10 minutes soon after.

At Bintang Walk, thousands poured in to greet 2002 despite the slight drizzle.

Joining the over 100,000 crowd were Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Datuk Bandar Datuk Mohamad Shaid Mohd Taufik and YTL Corporation Bhd managing director Tan Sri Francis Yeoh.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir expressed hope for the year 2002 to be a better blessed one.

"I was here last year and wished for a Happy New Year, but my wish did not come true. It was a lousy 2001, filled with serious problems. Hopefully, year 2002 will be a better one," he said.

The crowd started converging as early as 6pm. Two hours later, there was hardly room to move as people scurried to secure the best seat for the highly awaited YTL's concert.

At the Petronas Twin Towers, shouts of "Happy New Year" could be heard throughout the area at the stroke of midnight.

The climax of the celebration was the exhilarating fireworks display, which lit up the night sky in a dazzling array of colours.

At Sungai Wang Plaza, the Countdown 2K2 celebration at Fiesta Street kicked off at 7pm with modern and traditional dances performed by the Pinang Cultural Centre.

There was a fashion show and hair cutting demonstration by Michael Poh from the Hair Zone Studio and stalls selling chocolates and caricatures.

At Sunway Lagoon Beach Walk, more than 10,000 people turned up to watch an extraordinary sight of fireworks display complete with songs and entertainment.

Meanwhile, people also gathered at churches, temples and other places of worship in Kuala Lumpur to offer prayers.

Hundreds thronged the People Progressive Party's New Year Countdown party at its headquarters in Kampung Atap here.

At Bangsar Baru, the celebration centred at Jalan Telawi Tiga. Thousands of people, mainly youngsters, gathered along the road or patronised the cafes and pubs while waiting for the clock to strike at midnight.

At the Bangsar Shopping Complex, the crowd gathered as early as 9pm. Revellers were enthralled by the fantastic and colourful performances of musicians.

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