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Ushering in 45th national birthday in splendour

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ON the stroke of midnight, the nation ushered in its 45th birthday in splendour as millions from all walks of life and racial backgrounds remembered the day we achieved independence.

In true patriotic spirit, people converged on countdown venues, and on the stroke of midnight, shouts of Merdeka reverberated across the nation.

In keeping with tradition, the highlight in Kuala Lumpur was the midnight countdown at Dataran Merdeka, which was attended by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

Cabinet ministers, including Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik and Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, were present.

The thousands who thronged Dataran Merdeka were undeterred by the evening downpour in the city that only stopped shortly before midnight. The wet weather did not dampen their spirits, and they had a good time expressing their happiness and joy at being Malaysians.

On the stroke of midnight, Dr Mahathir shouted Merdeka seven times, followed loudly each time by the crowd.

This was followed by the hoisting of the Jalur Gemilang by Malaysian Naval Academy recruits, accompanied by the national anthem, Negaraku.

Patriotic songs like Jalur Gemilang and Keranamu Malaysia were sang by a choir.

Earlier, a 20-minute drama Merdeka-Merdeka was performed.

The crowd was also treated to a spell-binding 10-minute fireworks display. Artistes, including Tan Sri S.M. Salim, Jamal Abdillah and Ramlah Ram, entertained the crowd. There was also merry-making at the Kuala Lumpur City Centre and in Putrajaya.

At the KLCC park, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and ministers began the countdown with the people.

The "Suria Merdeka" concert featured performances by Dayang Nur Faizah, Amy Mastura, Jay Jay and M. Nasir, among others.

At the Merdeka Eve bash at Putrajaya Lake Club, the brightly-lit floating stage with the Prime Minister's office was the perfect backdrop.

Themed One Dance, One Voice, One Rhythm the colourful Ambang Merdeka di Putrajaya celebration kicked off with a dikir barat performance on a moving boat.