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Joys of `Merdeka`

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DESPITE the rain for almost two hours, thousands of Malaysians braved it to welcome the 45th Merdeka Day, with celebrations held in various parts of the city last Friday.

At the Kuala Lumpur City Centre, most of the young and old, including tourists, were drenched, while some came prepared with umbrellas to watch the three-hour "Konsert Suria Merdeka 2002", which was broadcasted "live" over Astro Ria.

Others tried to cover themselves with the Jalur Gemilang that they brought with them for the countdown, but were drenched eventually. However drenched they were, no one budged from the place.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his wife, Datin Seri Endon Mahmood, also joined in the celebration there, which was organised by Suria KLCC Berhad, Petronas, Astro and Exxon Mobil.

Francissca Peters, Jay Jay, Candy Cheah, Amy Mastura, Hattan, M. Nasir, Sasi the Don, Exists, Too Phat and Dayang Nurfaizah were among several artistes who delivered patriotic songs and hits from their albums.

The rain subsided 30 minutes before midnight and as the countdown began, fireworks lit up the sky for five minutes and people cheered "Merdeka" several times, while waving the Jalur Gemilang distributed by Petronas.

At Dataran Merdeka, the celebration, led by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, was just as exciting as in previous years.

Meanwhile, the night throbbed to the sounds of hip-hop and alternative music while the Malaysian MTV generation danced in their inimitable fashion at the "Fiesta Steet@Sungei Wang 3-2-1 Merdeka Countdown" at Sungei Wang Plaza in Kuala Lumpur.

There was no holding back the teenagers who bopped, nodded their heads and did punk versions of square dancing to performances by upcoming artistes, like Trimatra, Flop Poppy, Sub Culture and Gerhana Ska Cinta, among others, while waiting for the Merdeka countdown to start.

Organised by Sungei Wang Plaza and Red 104.9 station, owned by Redifussion Berhad, the street fiesta was also peppered by fun contests hosted by Red 104.9 deejays as well as performances by new artistes Siti Sarah and Fazley.

Pumping up the Aug 31 mood in the eclectic crowd of students, shoppers, diners and tourists was singer Nora, accompanied by Roslan Shah - also known as "Sudirman Singapura" - who did a commendable job with the late Sudirman's hit song 31 Ogos.

When the clock struck 12, the crowd screamed, whistled and waved the mini Jalur Gemilang. Then they partied on.

At the Surf Beach of the Sunway Lagoon Theme Park in Bandar Sunway, Petaling Jaya, about 7,000 people turned up to catch a show by solo artiste Michael Wong and boy-band Innuendo. Guests were also entertained by a troupe from Sarawak.

The countdown was followed by a 15-minute spectacular fireworks display accompanied by thunderous cheers from the crowd.

Merdeka eve celebrations were also held at the Mines Resort City in Seri Kembangan, Selangor and in Kuala Lumpur's Petaling Street, while several other shopping complexes, restaurants and night spots in the Klang Valley also celebrated the occasion in their own style with shoppers and patrons.

The Bangsar Shopping Centre in Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur celebrated the

occasion with a performance by children from The Music Shop. At 7.30pm, the children began singing songs like Keranamu Malaysia and Setia, receiving loud applause from shoppers. The children, aged between four and 16, also played musical instruments like the guitar, electone organ, percussion and violin.

But in the Jalan Telawi area in Bangsar, the celebration was quite a disappointment.

Very few were seen with the Jalur Gemilang although garbed in their best party gear.

At the stroke of midnight, faint sounds of "Merdeka" were heard.

Revellers went on drinking, chatting and dancing into the wee hours, seemingly oblivious to the country's most auspicious moment.