

31 AUG 2002

Eve-Celebrations

LEADERS, RAKYAT CELEBRATE MERDEKA EVE IN GREAT SPIRIT

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 30 (Bernama) -- Shouts of "Merdeka" filled the Merdeka Square and KLCC Park here tonight as tens of thousands of Malaysians including national leaders joined the Merdeka Eve 2002 celebrations in great spirit.

With the brightly lit Sultan Abdul Samad Building in the background, the square became the attraction of every strata of society including foreign tourists who wanted to see the clock at the tower of the historical building strike 12 midnight to start the beginning of a new day, Aug 31 -- the 45th National Day of Malaysia.

The cold night air following the rain that had fallen since early evening and continued until midnight did not dampen the spirit of Malaysians to celebrate the arrival of the 45th National Day which was held at the two main locations.

Exactly at 12 midnight, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad together with his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali and several cabinet ministers cheerfully shouted "Merdeka" seven times and they were echoed by the thousands of people who had flocked to the Merdeka Square located in the heart of the federal capital.

Dr Mahathir, who was standing on a special stage together with other dignitaries, joined the choir in singing the national anthem "Negaraku" and the patriotic songs 'Jalur Gemilang' and 'Kerana Mu Malaysia', as they waved the Jalur Gemilang flags.

At the KLCC Park, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and several cabinet ministers joined the thousands of city dwellers in shouting "Merdeka".

Earlier, those present were entertained to the Suria Merdeka Concert sponsored by Petronas, KLCC, Astro and Exxon Mobil with performances by several popular local artistes.

The air space over the city was brightened by the colourful fireworks display from the Merdeka Square and KLCC Park that lasted about 10 minutes which was the climax for the night and greeted by loud cheers from the people.

Dr Mahathir's arrival at Merdeka Square at 11.20pm was greeted by Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Paduka Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir.

While waiting for 12 midnight, the people were entertained to patriotic songs by local artistes, poetry declamation and popular songs and excerpts of stage plays.

A group of riders on "Comel" scooters manufactured by Modenas carried the Jalur Gemilang and presented one of the flags to Dr Mahathir.

Roads heading towards Merdeka Square and around the KLCC were congested with tens of thousands of city dwellers and people from all over the country wanting to join in the Merdeka Eve celebrations.

Similar programmes were also held throughout the country.

In KUALA TERENGGANU, the Merdeka eve celebrations at the Stadium Sultan Ismail Nasiruddin Shah, began with the recital of Quranic verses in heavy rain initially.

The downpour, which started at 8.30pm and lasted about two hours, did not prevent the people from flocking to the stadium to celebrate the national day. Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang, State Secretary Datuk Ku Abdul Azah Syed Alwee and State Exco members were also present to join in the celebrations.

Abdul Hadi was escorted by 1,000 motorcyclists carrying the national flags, Jalur Gemilang.

State Exco for Sports, Culture and Tourism Wan Hassan Mohd Ramli later led the procession to hand over the Jalur Gemilang to the Menteri Besar followed by the independence message by the State Secretary and the National Day message by Abdul Hadi.

The celebrations began at 9pm and were divided into four segments filled with various performances including a "Dikir Barat" by the Sound of Terengganu Group, songs by the Soutul Amal Group and the state choir group, and poetry declamation.

Abdul Hadi also cheered "Merdeka" followed by the "Takbir".

The celebrations concluded with the song "Jalur Gemilang", "Tanggal 31 Ogos" and the theme song "Because of You Malaysia" and the "zikir" praising the Prohpet.

In KOTA BAHARU, about 30,000 people gathered at Stadium Sultan Mohamed IV for the celebrations at the Kelantan state level.

The colourful event, which started at 9pm, was opened by Kelantan Deputy Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Halim Abdul Rahman who represented Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat.

The celebrations began with the Forum on Independence which touched on social, economic and political aspects to attract youths to appreciate the value of love for the people and nation.

This was followed by a 'nasyid' performance by Kumpulan Hijaz, a silat demonstration by 100 exponents from 'Kumpulan Silat Dua Kalimat' Kelantan, 'Dikir Barat', a performance entitled 'Simfoni Etnik Merdeka' by 150 participants comprising ethnic Malays, Thais, Indians, Chinese and Orang Asli.

The climax was the countdown to 12 midnight followed by shouts of "MERDEKA" repeated seven times and the raising of the Jalur Gemilang which was accompanied by the singing of the national anthem 'Negaraku' and 'Keranamu Malaysia'.

The celebrations concluded with a fireworks display which brightened the air space over the stadium.

In IPOH, about 10,000 people thronged the Ipoh town field to join the Merdeka Eve celebrations which began at 9pm.

There were performances by singer Erra Fazira and four cultural troupes representing the Malay, Chinese, Indian and Orang Asli communities.

Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali arrived at about 10.55pm to join the crowd. He was accompanied by state executive councillors and senior state government officials.

In a spirited display of patriotism, the crowd shouted "Merdeka" seven times on the stroke of midnight before the Jalur Gemilang was hoisted.

This was followed by the singing of the national anthem Negaraku and Jalur Gemilang and Keranamu Malaysia songs.

There was a seven-minute fireworks display before 45 Kong Ming Tan lanterns were released by kindergarten pupils.

In SHAH ALAM, the Sultan of Selangor Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah was at the Dataran Kemerdekaan to join in the celebrations.

Sultan Sharafuddin, accompanied by Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Mohamad Khir Toyo, witnessed a parade by 20 contingents representing government agencies, local authorities, the private sector and non-governmental organisations.

Dr Mohd Khir also recited a poem titled "Aksara Kemerdekaan" before the countdown to midnight began.

In ALOR SETAR, rain did not dampen the spirit of some 10,000 people who gathered at Dataran Tunku to usher in the 45th National Day.

Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain also did not budge

from his place on stage despite the rain.

Incidentally, as soon as the 10-second countdown to midnight began, the rain stopped.

At the stroke of midnight, the crowd let out cries of "Merdeka" seven times.

A 30-minute fireworks display then followed, adding gaiety to the occasion and further lifting the spirits of the revellers.

Retired soldier Nasir Abas, 47, received a certificate from a Malaysia Book of Records representative for his feat in running solo round the peninsula.

Nasir began his 1,754km run in Rantau Panjang, Kelantan, on Aug 1 and completed his journey in Padang Besar at the Malaysia-Thailand border today.

In KANGAR, thousands of people filled up the Stadium Utama despite the heavy rain to celebrate the Merdeka Eve.

The rain did not dampen their spirit as they waited for 12 midnight for the raising of the Jalur Gemilang and the singing of patriotic songs after being entertained by various cultural performances and witnessing the presentation of independence awards.

One of the opponents to the Malayan Union, Datuk Nordin Ismail, 79, was announced as an independence figure and received a souvenir from Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim.

At the ceremony, Shahidan also received the Jalur Gemilang from participants of the Jalur Gemilang Run led by State Exco for Public Utilities Datuk Yazid Mat.

One thousand runners had participated in the 40-kilometre run which started at Padang Besar.

The Menteri Besar also welcomed the arrival of two cyclists, Wan Shahidan Yahya, 43, and Adi Najib Ahmad, 26, who concluded their journey of 851 kilometres from Johor Baharu to Kangar.

-- BERNAMA

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