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Patriotism aglow as people celebrate 45th N-day

MORE PICTURES ON P4 & 6 KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Malaysians celebrated the country's 45th birthday with the Jalur Gemilang being proudly unfurled nationwide in a spirit of patriotic fervour and pride.

Shouts of "Merdeka" reverberated in villages, towns and cities, echoing the rakyat's confidence as Malaysia works towards attaining developed nation status.

Similar sentiments were evident at stadiums, squares and fields where Statelevel celebrations were held, with participants hoisting the national flag as high as they could and singing the NegaraKu and patriotic songs like Jalur Gemilang and Keranamu Malaysia with fervour and passion.

At Dataran Merdeka here, thrilling drum beats, vibrant floats and bright costumes during the parade set feet tapping and smiles aplenty.

Dressed in the colours of the Jalur Gemilang and ethnic garb, participants marched and danced their way into the hearts of the thousands that turned up since 7am.

The event started with the arrival of Yang diPertuan Agong Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Syed Putra Jamalullail and Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Fauziah Tengku Abdul Rashid in a carriage drawn by four regal looking horses.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Cabinet ministers, deputy ministers and government officials joined in the celebrations, taking their positions at the platform to view this year's parade themed Tourism.

During the national anthem, the perfect morning sky had a flash of colours when five helicopters flew past with flags and released red, blue and green smoke.

The Rukunegara was then recited, followed by seven passionate cries of 'Merdeka' led by seven students from different races and the recital of a stirring poem entitled Malaysia Bumi Tercinta written by Gunawan Mahmood, accompanied by the soothing sounds of a flute.

Next up was the Simfoni Irama Gendang Malaysia which showcased 1,000 students from 21 secondary schools in the Federal Territory and 500 professional drummers.

The beats were infectious with 1,484 drums from different races being played together, including the rebana ubi, kertuk aum and kelapa, Chinese drums, taval and tablas, Thai drums, kompang, jidor and ketebung.

On a platform, students dressed in colours forming the Jalur Gemilang gaily performed the Mexican wave to create a flowing Malaysian flag and also rolled out a giant piece of cloth with the National Day's overall theme Keranamu Malaysia or "For You, Malaysia" logo.

The march-past contingents included uniformed bodies, school children, corporations, industrial workers and the armed forces and police. The Tourism component which started the march consisted of those from the hotel, agro-tourism, culture, arts and sports industry, the Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents and the Malaysian Tourist Guides Council.

The floats from various corporations captured the attention, while a definite crowd pleaser was the seasoned Citrawarna Malaysia contingent that once again gave an enthusiastic and upbeat performance.

Adding to the excitement was "action" in the sky with aircraft performing aerobatics.

Similar State-level celebrations were also held nationwide, with people

flocking to stadiums and squares to mark the occasion.