

30 AUG 2003

Merdeka-Celebrations

KL TRANSFORMED INTO CITY OF LIGHTS, WITH SONGS, DANCES ON MERDEKA EVE

By: S. Retnanathan

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 30 (Bernama) -- Tens of thousands of Malaysians thronged the city while buildings were brightly lit with decorative lights, turning the federal capital into a sea of lights in conjunction with the nation's 46th National Day celebrations here this evening.

Malaysians from all walks of life gathered at various locations to usher in the Merdeka eve revelry, undaunted by the heavy downpour which lashed Kuala Lumpur since this evening.

While roads leading to the city were clogged with traffic, loads of revellers took things a bit slow, shouting "Merdeka" to passer-bys calming nerves of those stuck in the notorious KL traffic jam.

The crowd started gathering at various spots of the Merdeka eve celebrations since early afternoon, hoping to grab the best seats for the event, which lasted till past midnight.

The main areas of focus were the Bintang Walk, the Kuala Lumpur City Centre (where the famous Petronas Twin Towers stand) and Dataran Merdeka, the city's historic landmark.

At Bintang Walk, located at the busy shopping district along Jalan Bukit Bintang, the crowd was more mixed, with tourists taking the once-a-year opportunity to watch the uniqueness of Malaysians of various races ushering in the National Day revelry.

The dazzling multi-coloured fire works display and entertainment for the thousands who filled Jalan Bukit Bintang to join in the celebrations added colour to the festive atmosphere.

At the KL City Centre, where the world's tallest Petronas Twin Towers is located, a concert was organised for the thousands of people, including tourists, who had gathered there since 2pm.

But the highlight of the Merdeka eve celebrations was at Merdeka Square where the countdown to the National Day was held.

Prelude to the countdown was a show dubbed "Ambang Merdeka", showcasing the country's rich cultural heritage. The show began at 5pm and ran up to midnight and despite the rain, Malaysians stood rooted to witness the colourful event.

KL City Hall switched on decorative lights on 100 buildings in the city at 7pm, enhancing its image as the city of lights.

Opposite the Merdeka Square, an 18-year-old Jayabarathi Letchemanah pulled a 4.8 tonne TD2000 vehicle with her hair at Jalan Raja, wanting to carve a record in the Malaysia Book of Records.

This feat was also part of the Merdeka eve celebrations.

From 9pm onwards, there was the beating of drums and traditional cultural dances of the various communities residing in this nation with local artistes like Datuk Sharifah Aini, Too Phat, Fauziah Ahmad Daud and Rem entertaining the crowd.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his wife Datin Paduka Seri Endon Mahmood not to be left out of the pomp and splendour graced the event.

A total of 460 students took part in a 20-minute harmonica concert in honour of the Prime Minister who would be retiring in October after 22 years in power.

About 100 holders of various records including English Channel conqueror Datuk Malik Mydin and singer Siti Nurhaliza were then introduced

to Dr Mahathir.

Dr Mahathir and Abdullah then led thousands of Malaysians in counting the seconds to midnight and then to shouts of "Merdeka" seven times.

The new version of the national anthem "NegaraKu" was then sung.

The final show of the night was an hour-long dazzling display of fireworks from midnight from Padang Merbok.

In JOHOR, the Ambang Kemerdekaan celebrations started with tahlil and thanksgiving prayers at the Tangkak Masjid Jamek.

Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman and state executive councillors and senior state government officers attended the prayers after Maghrib prayers.

Since 8.45pm, about 10,000 people started gathering at Dataran Ledang.

In PUTRAJAYA, the residents started flocking to Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Putrajaya field at Precint 8 to usher in the Ambang Merdeka festivities.

Before going to Dataran Merdeka, Dr Mahathir and Abdullah with their wives spent about an hour with the people, enjoying the concert and fireworks display.

For the first time, Putrajaya will be the venue for the Merdeka Day parade which will be held at the newly opened boulevard tomorrow morning.

More than 300,000 people are expected to witness the historic event.

In PERAK, the Ambang Merdeka celebrations this year will be held at Dataran Lumut which would be attended by about 25,000 people who started to gather at the square since 5pm.

The celebrations started at 8pm with the screening of patriotic movies, performances of local artistes, cultural shows and poetry recitals.

Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali, state executive councillors and senior state government officials arrived at 10pm to join in the celebrations.

At 11.59pm, Tajol started the countdown, by shouting Merdeka! Merdeka! seven times. Following that, the national anthem was played, the Jalur Gemilang and Keranamu Malaysia songs were sang.

The event ended with a 10-minute fireworks display which were released from the sea.

In KOTA BAHARU, about 15,000 people gathered at Sultan Mohamed IV Stadium here to take part in the Ambang Merdeka celebrations.

The colourful event which started at 9.30pm was launched by Deputy Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Halim Abdul Rahman.

The function was attended by state executive councillors and senior state government officials. It started with traditional music.

Six elephants and eight horses and 50 Malay warriors carrying the Merdeka proclamation scroll was symbolic to the independence proclamation by the country's First Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Alhaj.

The proclamation was handed to Abdul Halim to be read out.

In SELANGOR, the Ambang Merdeka celebrations were held at Dataran Merdeka here tonight.

The drizzle did not dampen 10,000 people from all walks of life to gather at the square.

Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Mohamad Khir Toyo, State Secretary Datuk Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof and state executive councillors were present.

Various exciting events were held in conjunction with the celebrations.

In MELAKA, the Ambang Merdeka celebrations were held at the Melaka International Trade Centre (MITC) in Air Keroh tonight.

The drizzle did not dampen the crowd from converging at the MITC.

Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam joined more than 10,000 people to start the countdown at 12 midnight.

Earlier, Mohd Ali received the Jalur Gemilang and Melaka flags from 46

youths who took part in a kayak expedition to Dumai, Indonesia on Thursday.

The convoy, which arrived in Melaka at 8pm, earned a mention in the Malaysia Book of Records for grouping the highest number of kayak participants to cross the Straits of Melaka at one time.

Cultural performances of Malays, Chinese, Indians, Portuguese, Chetty community, Baba and Nyonya added colour to the festivities.

In PENANG, more than 10,000 people thronged the Padang Kota Lama to watch Merdeka eve celebrations which started at 8.30pm.

Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon and state executive councillors were also present in the count-down to midnight.

In KUALA TERENGGANU, 4,000 people packed the Sultan Ismail Nasiruddin Shah Stadium for similar celebrations.

Senior State Executive Councillor Datuk Mustapa Ali represented Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang at the function which was preceded by a procession of 1,000 motorcycles bearing the Jalur Gemilang.

In KANGAR, the rain did not dampen the spirit of the crowd to gather at the Utama Stadium for the celebrations which culminated with a 15-minute fireworks display.

During the function, Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim received the national flag from a group of runners who arrived from Padang Besar.

-- BERNAMA

ZU TAJ AD ABG