

31 AUG 2003

Merdeka-Parade

NATIONAL DAY MARKED BY SPECTACULAR PARADE IN PUTRAJAYA

PUTRAJAYA, Aug 31 (Bernama) -- Malaysia's 46th National Day was celebrated in grand style today as thousands participated in a dazzling parade held for the first time at the nation's administrative capital of Putrajaya.

The Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Syed Putra Jamalullail, and the Raja Permaisuri Agong, Tuanku Fauziah Tengku Abdul Rashid, joined an estimated 300,000 people at the Dataran Putrajaya, through which passes part of the 4.2km Boulevard, the centre of the national-level celebrations.

Making his last appearance as prime minister at a national day parade was Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, whose immense contributions to the country's progress were showcased during the procession. The prime minister will leave office in October.

The event, which was beamed live to the homes of millions of Malaysians across the country, started with the arrival of their majesties in a horse-drawn carriage at the VVIP dais mounted in front of the majestic Palace of Justice.

The flag-raising ceremony was accompanied by a powerful and inspiring rendition of the new version of the "Negaraku", followed by patriotic songs "Jalur Gemilang" and "Kerlanamu Malaysia".

Helicopters bearing the flags of the various states in Malaysia flew overhead.

Today's event went into full swing with a vibrant performance by the Malaysian Citizens Symphony Group comprising 500 orchestra members, 1,000 choir singers, 3,000 drummers and 2,000 dancers.

The stage fronting the VVIP dais and the street separating them sprang to life as the colourfully-clad dancers swayed to the energetic beat of a medley of traditional and contemporary music.

Next came the parade which saw the participation of nearly 23,000 people, comprising 63 contingents, 22 brass bands, 18 floats, 20 aircraft and 312 vehicles.

The procession down the Boulevard -- involving marchers from the various government agencies, non-governmental organisations, the private sector and uniformed organisations -- displayed the nation's progress for the past 22 years, highlighting its military prowess and underlining Malaysia's renowned racial harmony.

It started near the Putrajaya Convention Centre, the venue of the upcoming 10th Summit of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, and ended at the Dataran Wawasan situated in front of the Ministry of Finance Complex.

Earlier, the recitation of the Rukun Negara was led by Khairul Anwar Abdul Ghani of Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Taman Tun Dr Ismail after which the enthusiastic flag-waving crowd filled the Boulevard with shouts of "Merdeka".

Present were Dr Mahathir's wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Cabinet ministers and members of the diplomatic corps.

Malaysia gained independence from Britain in 1957, the year which saw the "Union Jack" lowered for the last time at the historic Sultan Abdul Samad building in Kuala Lumpur.

And for the fourth consecutive year "Kerlanamu Malaysia" was chosen as

the theme of the National Day celebrations.

Also taking part in the parade were several Malaysians who had made the nation proud with their achievements, including English Channel conqueror Datuk Abdul Malik Mydin, mariner Datuk Azhar Mansor, Mount Everest climber M. Magendran and bodybuilding champion Sazali Samad.

The revellers were also thrilled by a spectacular display by Royal Malaysian Air Force warplanes which criss-crossed the skies above Putrajaya.

The Culture, Arts and Tourism Ministry has flown in some 300 media people from abroad, including representatives of 51 television stations, to cover the National Day events with the aim of promoting Malaysia internationally.

Dr Mahathir left the parade in the NAZA Ria, a multipurpose vehicle which he launched on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, in MIRI, Sarawak, 4,500 people in 88 contingents participated in a colourful National Day parade at Stadium Miri.

Present were Yang Dipertua Negeri Tun Abang Muhammad Salahuddin and his wife, Toh Puan Norkiah, chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, state cabinet members and thousands of people.

Addressing the parade, Abdul Taib said tough challenges were ahead as the nation marched forward towards realising Vision 2020.

"However these challenges will become light and can be overcome if we cooperate, if people become knowledgeable workers and are even more united and did not practise narrow racial politics," he said.

In MELAKA, a 10,700 strong National Day parade was held at the Independence Declaration Memorial in Bandar Hilir.

The parade participants who included school children then marched in procession for eight kilometres from Bandar Hilir to Stadium Hang Tuah.

Melaka Yang Dipertua Negeri Tun Syed Ahmad Shahabudin and Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam were among the 5,000 people who watched the procession.

In ALOR STAR, there were no celebrations of any kind as Kedah is mourning the death of the Sultanah of Kedah Her Royal Highness the late Tuanku Bahiyah Tuanku Abdul Rahman.

She died on Tuesday at Istana Kuala Cegar, Anak Bukit, after a long illness.

In SEREMBAN, the National Day parade was held at the Municipal Council ground in Jalan Yam Tuan.

Some 5,000 people in 88 contingents took part in the parade and then marched in procession for two kilometres through Jalan Yam Tuan, Jalan Dr Krishnan and Jalan Datuk Bandar Tunggai.

The Yang di-Pertuan Besar of Negeri Sembilan Tuanku Ja'afar, The Undangs of Jelebu, Johol, Rembau and Sungai Ujong and the Tunku Besar of Tampin as well as Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohamed Isa Abdul Samad were present.

In KOTA BAHARU, Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat took the salute and inspected a parade mounted by 4,000 people at the Stadium Sultan Mohamad IV.

Members of the Regiment 506, Territorial Army, put up a non-armed combat display, adding thrill to the occasion.

In KANGAR, the Regent of Perlis Tuanku Syed Faizuddin ibni Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin released 46 pegions symbolising the 46th anniversary of independence.

The Regent also took the salute and reviewed a parade mounted by 13,000 people at Dataran Merdeka.

The Raja Puan Muda of Perlis, Her Royal Highness Tuanku Lailatul Shahreen Akashah graced the occasion.

The longest ever Jalur Gemilang measuring 273 metres by 2.3 metres sewed jointly by students and academic staff of the Kolej Universiti Kejuruteraan Utara Malaysia (Kukum) was also displayed at the parade.

In KUALA TERENGGANU, Terengganu Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang was among some 5,000 people who turned up to watch the National Day parade mounted by representatives of various agencies and the private sector at the Stadium Sultan Ismail Nasiruddin Shah. The 7,000 odd parade participants then marched to Pantai Batu Buruk led by a school band.

In TANGKAK, a rural town in Johor, was the centre of this year's state level National Day celebrations. Some 15,000 people gathered at the Dataran Ledang to watch a parade formed by some 97 contingents.

Speaking at the function, Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman said the various races in Malaysia were a fortunate lot being able to live in peace and harmony and sharing a common future.

They achieved independence together through the spirit of compromise and sacrifice, he said.

"In this multiracial country, the interests of one race should be balanced with that of the people as a whole," he said.

In KUANTAN, the National Day parade was held at the Municipal Council Field. The parade participants then marched in procession through Jalan Mahkota to the Kompleks Teruntum.

Among the 30,000 people who watched the parade were the Tengku Mahkota of Pahang Tengku Abdullah and Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob.

People took advantage of the National Day holiday to visit the Teluk Cempedak and Cherating beaches for picnics.

In PENANG, Yang Dipertua Negeri Tun Abdul Rahman Abbas and Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon were among thousands of people who watched the National Day parade and procession at Padang Pemuda Merdeka in Butterworth.

In MANJUNG, a rural town in Perak, more than 30,000 people lined the Sitiawan-Lumut road to watch the National Day procession.

Sultan Azlan Shah, Raja Muda Raja Nazrin Shah; Raja Di Hilir, Raja Jaafar Raja Muda Musa and Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali attended the celebrations.

This evening the Sultan, Menteri Besar and other VIPs will attend a National Day tea party at Dataran Lumut in Lumut.

-- BERNAMA

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