

30/08/2003

Get set for biggest Merdeka Day celebration

Farrah Naz Karim

PUTRAJAYA, Fri. - If there is an occasion that Malaysians should not miss, then the 46th Merdeka Day celebrations to be held here on Sunday morning is definitely it.

It promises to be an occasion that will be long remembered, and this was reflected in today's dress rehearsal.

Set to be the biggest Merdeka Day celebration ever, over 20,000 people gathered as early as six this morning at Dataran Putra to perfect their marching and performances before the historical day.

The sudden downpour during the two-hour rehearsal did not dampen their spirit as they marched down a 1.6km stretch along the Boulevard.

Against the backdrop of majestic government offices that line the 4.2km Boulevard, some 400,000 Malaysians are expected to join the colourful celebration starting at 7am at the Federal administrative capital.

Present at today's rehearsal was Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir, who monitored the parade and procession from the grandstand, making sure all went smoothly.

He later told reporters the celebration would also see Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad attending this year's National Day parade for the last time as the Prime Minister as he will retire in October.

"I am confident this will be an extraordinary event... it will live up to our hopes of expressing our appreciation to the Prime Minister." Malaysians at the event will also sing to the new tempo of the Negaraku as the Jalur Gemilang is raised.

Apart from the marchpast from contingents including uniformed bodies, school children, corporations, industrial workers, the armed forces and police who will be dressed in, among others, the colours of the Jalur Gemilang and ethnic costumes, the public will also witness floats from various corporations.

The massive group of 2,500 drummers from different races playing the rebana ubi, kertuk aum and kelapa, Chinese drums, tavil and tablas, Thai drums, kompang, jidor and ketebung simultaneously, will add to the the festivities.

Helicopters from the armed forces carrying the Jalur Gemilang and the flags of all States will make a fly-past.

The Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin and Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Fauziah will grace the event, arriving in the royal carriage.

Kadir said some 300 foreign journalists had been invited to cover the parade and the Merdeka eve celebrations tomorrow night at Dataran Merdeka in Kuala Lumpur.

Folks from all over the world will be able to watch the show over television as more than 50 local and foreign TV stations will be covering the event.