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Thousands throng stadium for BN bash

Zubaidah Abu Bakar; Chow Kum Hor; Sajahan Waheed; Aniza Damis; Ahmad KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The Merdeka Stadium today was like a honey pot that drew `bees' and `ants' of varying colours and sizes.

People came in the thousands from all over the country to join national leaders in celebrating Barisan Nasional's 50th anniversary.

There were people from as near as Brickfields and as far as Sabah. They came on foot, by bus, car, taxi, train, and the latest mode of transport in the city - the Monorail.

Long before the celebration started, supporters had begun converging on the historic stadium, where 46 years ago the cries of "Merdeka!" rang out heralding a new beginning for what was then Malaya.

Along the roadsides, banners proclaiming the meet and its theme, Kongsi Kuasa Kejayaan Malaysia (Power Sharing is Malaysia's Success) led the path to the stadium.

Conveniently for everyone, the monorail's Maharajaleela stop led straight to the stadium's parking lot, and every 10 minutes, crowds poured out of the station, moving across the parking lot in their blue, black, pink, red or yellow t-shirts, chirping in excitement and waving deep blue BN flags and unfurling party banners.

The crowd braved the scorching afternoon heat to join Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and other component party leaders to celebrate BN's 50 glorious years of government.

This would be Dr Mahathir's last appearance at a BN gathering of such significance and scale before he steps down next month.

In a smooth transition of power, Abdullah will take over.

As supporters made their way into the stadium, they were greeted by cheery youth volunteers, who handed out BN flags and bottles of water, which were both well accepted.

The crowd broke into cheers and applause when Dr Mahathir entered the stadium in a brand-new Proton Cabriolet. He was accompanied by his wife, Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

Behind him in a similar Proton model was Abdullah with BN secretary-general Tan Sri Mohamed Rahmat.

By nearly 4pm, the weather was less punishing with clouds gently hovering above.

Outside the stadium, stalls selling food, tidbits, knick-knacks, cool drinks, umbrellas, caps, umbrella-caps (mini-sized umbrellas worn on the head), BN button badges and fog-horns were lined up along the main street behind the stadium.

Here, a more carnival-like atmosphere ruled. Families, groups of friends and pockets of strangers sat at stall-side tables, tucking into mini-meals and taking deep draughts of drinks.