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KUALA LUMPUR: It was a sight to behold and a moment to cherish as thousands from all walks of life joined national leaders for the 53rd National Day celebration at the Putra Stadium indoor arena in Bukit Jalil yesterday morning.

Themed *iMalaysia Transforming the Nation*, the first celebration to be held indoors was marked by colourful performances, a 14-gun salute, reading of a pledge and awe-inspiring displays of grit and courage by the security forces.

The sound of trumpets and thunderous applause from the 10,000 people in the stadium greeted the arrival of Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin and Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Nur Zahirah at 8am. Present were Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak, Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and cabinet ministers and their wives, sporting a specially-crafted *iMalaysia batik*.

Earlier, the royal couple were greeted by 500 National Service trainees and 440 students of the National Institute of Public Administration who lined both sides of the road leading to the venue.

On arrival, the King received the salute from four officers and 107 members of the 1st Battalion of the Royal Malay Regiment, followed by the singing of *Negaraku*. Tuanku Mizan also inspected the guard-of-honour mounted by the battalion, with the spectators, many of them children, waving the *Jalur Gemilang*.

The stadium erupted in patriotic fervour as seven shouts of "Merdeka" reverberated around the arena, followed by shouts of "iMalaysia, Rakyat Didahulukan, Pencapaian Diutamakan" (*iMalaysia, People First, Performance Now*). This was followed by a *iMalaysia* special performance featuring eight segments, including story-telling which incorporated the display of lights, choir performance and creative human formation to convey the *iMalaysia* message.

The *iMalaysia* segment, among others, showcased pictures of first prime minister and Father of Independence Tunku Abdul Rahman

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Spectators were glued to their seats as 1,640 performers went through their paces, one fascinating segment after another, capturing the essence of the various government initiatives and transformation plans such as the National Key Result Areas and the New Economic Model. There were also performances by the armed forces, including by members of the anti-terrorism unit and commandos.

The closing performance was by students of the Limkokwing University of Creative Technology and teachers' institutes as well as members of cultural groups, singing the *iMalaysia, Joget Malaysia* and *Jalur Gemilang* songs.

All in, the celebration, held indoor as a mark of respect for the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, involved 8,727 contingent members from departments and institutes under the Education Ministry, security forces personnel, staff of government agencies and departments as well as from the private sector.

In PENANG, hundreds of people flocked to Padang Kota, George Town, where the state-level Merdeka celebration was held. The celebration, which started at about 8.30am with good weather, saw more than 1,000 people, many armed with digital cameras, gathering along Lebuh Light, to watch a procession.

The event kicked off with the arrival of Penang Yang di-Pertua Negeri Tun Abdul Rahman Abbas and his consort Toh Puan Majimor Shariff. State VIPs present were Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng and his wife Betty Chew, State Assembly Speaker Datuk Abdul Halim Hussain, Deputy Chief Ministers Mansor Othman and Prof Dr P. Ramasamy, state exco members, assemblymen and senior civil servants.

Following a poetry recital by Dr Teo Gim Sean about the country's independence, there was a march past by 82 contingents comprising more than 4,000 people from various government agencies, NGOs, uniformed bodies, and school bands.

Similar celebrations were also held in all other state capitals.

1 Malaysia on show

> First indoor Merdeka celebration marked by colourful performances, vibrant displays and expressions of oneness



SHARIL AMIN ABD RAHIM/THE SUN

COLOURS OF MALAYSIA ... Youngsters taking part in the celebrations in Bukit Jalil (top) and Kuantan with the national flag.



BERNAMAPIX

Putra Al-Haj, as well as those of the first Yang di-Pertuan Agong until the present and 13th King and images of all prime ministers. This was followed by the human formation, assisted by choral speaking performance, and choir, for the 10th Malaysia Plan segment.

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