



Monday, March 16, 2009

London celebrations dedicated to peace

ABROAD: LONDON: Mayor Boris Johnson dedicated yesterday's St Patrick's Day celebrations in London to peace, as a mark of respect for the two soldiers and the police constable murdered by dissident republican terrorists in Northern Ireland.

"Our thoughts go out to the families and colleagues of the men who have lost their lives as a result of these latest murders," he said in his festival statement.

"We should dedicate London's St Patrick's Day celebrations to supporting peace in Ireland, which embody the true spirit of the Irish people – embracing all cultures and peoples, confident, forward-looking – and this tiny minority should not deflect them from the peace process."

Before addressing the crowds packing Trafalgar Square for an afternoon of partying bathed in sunshine, Minister for Finance Brian Lenihan said the "terrible events in Northern Ireland" in recent days underlined the importance of the British-Irish relationship and the need "to show how much we have in common". Thousands lined the route of the parade from Hyde Park Corner to Trafalgar Square. The square itself was filled to its official 10,000 capacity for the festival, which featured a mix of contemporary and traditional Irish music, stand-up comedy and storytelling, as well as craft and food stalls.

Johnson described London as "the best place in the world" outside Ireland to celebrate St Patrick's Day, before making way for a main stage line-up that included the Blizzards, boyband Clozure and electropop band Two Door Cinema Club, as well as Mary Coughlan and Tommy Fleming.

The line-up for the community stage, programmed by the London Irish Centre and the Irish Cultural Centre, included: fiddle player Claire Egan; Jennifer Curran and James Lyttle singing a selection of operatic pieces; Celtic melodies by Jacquelyn Hynes and Katie Crean; and a string quartet comprising members of the London Irish Symphony Orchestra. Lenihan thanked Johnson for his support in this year's festivities, which he said demonstrated that the Irish contribution to London was recognised and cherished.

Frank Millar, London Editor

BRUSSELS: About 400 people marched through Brussels yesterday for the city's first St Patrick's Day parade, which featured Dutch pipers, Belgian poodles and even a Franciscan monk.

Wearing a brown habit and clutching a wooden staff, Brother John Kealy looked every bit the 21st-century version of the patron saint as he led the parade through the EU quarter.

"I lived in Belgium for 15 years before moving back to the Multyfarnam Franciscan monastery in Co Westmeath last year. I really enjoyed it here," said Brother John, whose friary in Leuven closed a few years back due to a lack of monks.

A good marching beat was provided by the Canadian-Scottish memorial pipes and drums band, led by Dutch piper John Steenbergen.

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An exhibition of Gaelic sports, a barbecue, and an obligatory pint of Guinness rounded up the day's activities in Brussels, where celebrations will continue until Wednesday.

Jamie Smyth, European Correspondent

STOCKHOLM: The centre of Stockholm was awash with green and the sound of pipes on Saturday for the annual St Patrick's Day parade.

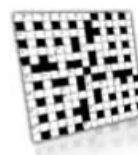
Hundreds of Irish and Swedish turned out to celebrate, marching behind Sweden's oldest pipeband: the Pipes and Drums of the First Royal Engineers.

The parade, organised by the Swedish Irish Society, started five years ago and support for the event has grown steadily, with normally reserved Swedes marching and congregating in Irish pubs afterwards for St Patrick's Day music and traditional Irish food.

Isabel Conway



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