



**SYNERGY:** Children, dressed in colours symbolic of the Turkish National flag, singing songs at the event.

Photos by Jayaram

# Moment of pride for Turkish kids

## Children steal the show at Turkish National Day celebrations in Doha

By Anand Holla

**O**n the sprawling lawns of the Turkish Embassy in Onaiza, the air was bursting with the breezy enthusiasm of children togged in red and white outfits symbolising the Turkish national flag, and parents who happily took the back seat for the day.

The beautiful colour-coded look though was not confined to kids alone. The entire venue, decorated with balloons, was bathed in a sea of resplendent Turkish national flags – a white crescent moon and star on a red background – as the Turkish community in Qatar came together to celebrate Turkish National Sovereignty and Children's Day.

For the 8,000 Turkish people living in Qatar, it is events such as these, which every once in a while, make them not miss home. Organised by Qatar's Turkish community and the Turkish Embassy, Wednesday evening's activities began with a moving poetry recital.

After observing a minute of silence as a mark of respect to the founder of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and also Turkish martyrs, everybody joined in singing the Turkish National Anthem.

Underlining the significance of the day, the Turkish Ambassador to Qatar, Ahmet Demirok, gave a brief speech, and threw the event open to

the kids. A stream of children under the age of 12, gathered to perform a few adorable choir versions of popular Turkish and English songs. The highlight of the lot was perhaps USA for Africa's 'We are the world,' which in the children's tender voices sounded as relevant as ever.

Some kids even pulled off cool rhymes and pop songs backed by musical accompaniment. For those interested in breaking a sweat, there was the fun routine of sack race and egg race, apart from enjoying gymnastic performances or getting one's face painted.

Ezgi Dora, a class six student whose solid vocals was the

cornerstone of most of the evening's performances, said, "It's really exciting to be here. I have been preparing for two weeks. This day is truly special as it's a good chance for us children to show that we too have talent and something to say."

Dora certainly understands the spirit of April 23. Atatürk, the man regarded as Turkey's Father of the Nation, established the foundations of a new, secular, independent and modern Turkey by inaugurating the Grand National Assembly in Ankara, on April 23, 1920.

Three years later, the convening of the first Turkish Parliament resulted in the declaration of a new nation. To emphasise how children are the architects of the nation's future, Atatürk dedicated April 23 to Turkey's children.

Since then, it is being celebrated as National Sovereignty and Children's Day. In fact, the Unicef has marked it as the International Children's Day.

"For the first time in world history, a day was dedicated to

children," Demirok said of the day's importance. "We would like to maintain great interaction with the Turkish community in Qatar, and embrace everybody regardless of their ethnic background, faith or political beliefs. We are here to take care of every Turkish person," he added.

Stressing on how an event like this is a terrific opportunity for the embassy to bring people together and "keep them together," Demirok said, "If you are living away from your home country, such events help you feel connected to your roots."

But Demirok likes to extend his largesse to everybody. "As ours is the biggest embassy in Qatar in terms of space, we like to host everybody here.

Our embassy is very active with social events and we host occasions for Qataris and expats from other countries as well. Doing so helps us promote our country better, both to our people and to those from other countries," he points out.

However, Demirok admits the challenge involved in portraying a culture as multi-layered as Turkish. "We cannot reflect Turkey's real potential because it has such rich and diverse traditions. That's why we try and hold events such as the recent Turkish festival, which was a grand success and registered record-breaking attendance," he added.

As groups of children feasted on snacks, cold drinks and goodies, and ran around the lawn, Demirok looked around and mused, "Such an event is especially important for Turkish children born here. This way they can keep in touch with their country's culture. We are happy to be party to that process," he said.

It wasn't just Turkish children who were having all the fun though. Also invited were children from other countries, who only added to the cheery atmosphere. "We are hosting other expat children as well because that way we can teach the young generation about peaceful co-existence and the advantages of living together peacefully," Demirok said.

"Also, tolerance," he added, "The world is suffering from certain prejudices. It's with the help of these occasions that we can break and destroy them."



**SOLENN:** Turkish nationals during the National Anthem.