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## Colourful send-off for 'Asha Amma'

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PETALING JAYA: It was a rare funeral procession which saw several hundred mourners singing, dancing and playing musical instruments as they paid their final respects to their "mother" M. Asha Devi.

The procession from Chow Kit to Lorong Haji Taib here saw participants from all over the world gathering to pay their last respects to Asha, a prominent figure among the transgender community here and overseas.



Grief-stricken: Mourners paying last respects to Asha during the procession in Kuala Lumpur. — S.S Kanesan / The Star

The funeral ceremony was similar to those performed by the *hijra* community in India.

The *hijras* are culturally defined as "neither men nor women" and they are referred to by some of India's English press as eunuchs.



Loss of an icon: Asha was adored by the transgender community.

They are also well-known for their traditional ways of earning a living collecting alms, receiving payments for blessing newborn males, performing at ceremonies and serving at the temple of their goddess.

Asha, who was fondly called "*Asha Amma*" (Mother Asha) or the "Indian godmother of Chow Kit", died on Tuesday from a heart attack at the age of 68.

She was the oldest transgender woman in Malaysia.

Having undergone a sex change operation in her early 20s, Asha received her Malaysian identification card as a woman at the age of 29.

Asha, whose husband died 14 years ago, had made a living running a small restaurant near Chow Kit

According to someone who knew her, Asha was respected by many transgenders as she had helped them acquire new identification cards as women and counselled many who wanted to undergo sex change operations.

Asha's death was widely reported in the local Tamil newspapers. Her colourful funeral procession ended at the Sentul crematorium.