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Renewing family and friendship ties during Lunar New Year

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Malaysians across the country celebrated Chinese New Year today in the classic tradition of renewing family and friendship ties in open house celebrations.

At Wisma MCA, headquarters for the MCA, the festivities kicked off at 9am with party president and Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik leading party leaders in playing hosts to thousands of people.

Also present were his wife, Datin Seri Ena Ling, and MCA deputy president and Human Resources Minister Datuk Lim Ah Lek, party vice-president and Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng and MCA secretary-general and Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh.

Lion dancers from Chee How Temple in Salak South put up an energetic performance, drawing several children to them in fascination.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and his wife, Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ibrahim, were among the early birds.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, arrived later and stayed to watch a comedy routine by Chee Hood Siong and Kenny Chan, better known as the Kenny and Chee Baba Nonya Cultural Show.

The pair entertained the crowd with their songs and sometimes ribald jokes, as well as their lighthearted reminders for everyone to spend wisely, holiday domestically and "buy Malaysian."

Later, at the Gerakan headquarters in Wisma PGRM, visitors savoured oranges, cookies and other local delicacies.

Celebrations started at 10am when party president and Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik greeted Anwar and Dr Wan Azizah who were the first dignitaries to arrive.

Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah, who arrived later were treated to a solo dance performance by 29-year-old Mew Chang Tsing who performed to the beat of gamelan music.

Among the foreign dignitaries present were Zimbabwe High Commissioner Chitsaka Chipaziwa and wife Julia Chipaziwa, and Namibian High Commissioner W. M. Ndeutapo Amagulu, who was accompanied by his wife Margaret Amagulu.

"This is the first time my wife and I are going to an 'open house' and are delighted to see everybody in a festive mood," said Amagulu.

Chipaziwa said it was a privilege to witness a public demonstration of a cultural festival celebrated by Malaysians of various races.

In Penang, the spirit of goodwill and cheer was in the air as over 3,000 people thronged Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon's Chinese New Year open house at Dewan Sri Pinang.

A traditional lion dance was performed at the hall where Koh and his wife Puan Sri Chui Kah Peng greeted guests, including Yang di-Pertua Negeri Tun Hamdan Sheikh Tahir.

Other VIPs present were Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Mohd Shariff Omar, Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Ibrahim Saad, State executive councillors and assemblymen.

In Kota Baru, hundreds of people took advantage of the holiday and thronged all four major supermarkets and shopping complexes to make last minute buys for Hari Raya Puasa.

There was never a dull moment at the check-out counters as the cashiers kept their cash registers ringing incessantly.

In Johor, the holiday was celebrated on a moderate scale with most families staying at home. Hotels, however, enjoyed brisk business with many Singapore Chinese families taking advantage of special festive packages.

The Causeway was free of traffic congestion with minimal movement of people on both sides.

In Malacca, Chief Minister Datuk Seri Abu Zahar Isnin reminded the people to celebrate the festivals on a moderate scale in view of the economic problems.

In a message aired over radio, Abu Zahar said each family must come up with their own resolutions on ways to assist the Government in overcoming the problems.

Meanwhile, several State MCA leaders opted to hold their open house at night in view of Ramadan to enable their Muslim counterparts to join them in the celebration.

In Kuching, Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Dr George Chan said people were more cautious in spending, which he stressed was the correct attitude in view of the economic situation.

He was speaking to reporters at the Sarawak United People's Party headquarters where he and other party leaders were holding a joint open house.

Dr Chan, who is also the party's chairman and State Finance Minister, also reiterated his call for people to buy local products to help the economy recover faster.

In Kota Kinabalu, Parti Bersatu Sabah president Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan hosted an open house at the Kian Kok Secondary School.

Many well wishers visited Pairin and other PBS leaders during the function and were entertained by lion dance performances.

Among those present at the function was State Gerakan chief, Dr Chong Eng Leong.

In Seremban, more than 3,000 well wishers turned up at the State MCA's open house at the Municipal Council Hall from 10am to noon today.

Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohamad Isa Abdul Samad, his wife Puan Sri Hazizah Tumin and daughter Juhaida graced the occasion hosted by State MCA chief, Datuk Wong Swee Wah.

In his speech, Mohamad Isa urged the people to always maintain peace and harmony among the races and to work together with the Government in overcoming the present economic problems.

In Kuala Terengganu, an open house was held by State Environment, Health and Consumer Affairs Committee chairman Wong Foon Meng.

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