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Claustrophobic experience for impatient group

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - In their impatience to get ahead of Prime Minister and his wife at the MCA Chinese New Year open house at Wisma MCA today, 20 people, including three reporters, inadvertently got trapped inside a lift.

The group, which included three children, were rushing to meet Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, who were taking the stairs to the ground floor.

Thinking they could outsmart others they hurried to the lift on the first floor and crammed themselves into it, ignoring the overload buzzer.

However, the lift door failed to open when it reached the ground floor.

When the door still did not open two minutes later they started to get nervous.

One man began to shout. Others began to pound on the door and rang the emergency bell.

However, their cries for help were muffled by the noise from the lion dance at the entrance of the building.

The children began to cry but were appeased by the adults.

One man tried to call for help on his cellphone while another tried to use his walkie-talkie but to no avail.

Some of the men tried to prise the inner door open but were able only to get an eight cm gap. The outer door of the lift remained stuck.

By then, their shouts for help finally attracted attention.

Ten minutes later, a security personnel managed to unlock the lift and helped all passengers out.

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