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Malaysians celebrate at open house gatherings

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The Chinese community ushered in the Year of the Rabbit with the fervent hope that the new year will bring good fortune, particularly in efforts to lift the economic fog.

If there was an economic recession, it didn't show on the faces of the Malaysians who happily made a beeline to the many open house functions traditionally held at the nation's capital.

In Kuala Lumpur, there were two main open houses - one hosted by the MCA and the other by the Gerakan, an annual ritual that has been on for decades.

And at both open houses was guest-of-honour Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad with his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his wife Datin Seri Endon Mahmood and other Cabinet Ministers and dignitaries also made their rounds.

Abdullah and Endon arrived first at Wisma MCA, followed by the Prime Minister and his wife, all received by MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik and his wife Datin Seri Ena Ling.

The Prime Minister and the other dignitaries were greeted by Chinese cultural dancers performing to the tune of Malay songs.

Over at the Gerakan open house held at Menara PGRM in Cheras, thousands were greeted by Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik and his deputy Datuk Kerk Choo Ting.

Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah also attended a Chinese New Year lunch hosted by the Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding at the Parkroyal Hotel.

In Malacca, well-wishers thronged the home of State MCA chief Datuk Wira Gan Boon Leong who held an open house at Jalan Kubu.

Among the dignitaries who turned up were the Yang di-Pertua Negeri Tun Syed Ahmad Shahabuddin and his consort Toh Puan Marfuza Sheikh Osman, and Chief Minister Datuk Seri Abu Zahar Isnin and his wife Datin Seri Khadijah Jiddi.

In Kota Baru, 300 guests attended the open house hosted by Kota Lama Assemblyman Leong Sue Siang at his residence at Lorong Sri Cemerlang.

In Seremban, 1,000 people attended the State MCA open house at the Seremban Municipal Council hall.

Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohamad Isa Samad and his wife Puan Seri Hazizah Tumin graced the occasion and were entertained to traditional Chinese songs and dances.

Among those present were State MCA chief Datuk Wong See Wah, Seremban Member of Parliament Datuk Hon Choon Kim, and State Executive Councillors Datuk Dr Yeow Chai Thiam and Datuk Goh Siow Huat.

In Penang, 10,000 thronged Rumah Tetamu along Jalan Macalister to wish Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon "Gong Xi Fa Cai".

Guests including Yang di-Pertua Negeri Tun Hamdan Sheikh Tahir, his wife Toh Puan Siti Zainab Baharuddin, Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Mohd Shariff Omar, other Barisan National leaders, Penang residents and visitors were received by Koh and his wife Puan Sri Chui Kah Peng and their children Yu Cheng and Yu Jun.

Penang Island Municipal Council president Dr Teng Hock Nan was also kept on his feet this morning receiving over 3,000 guests at his Jalan Park home.

In Alor Star, although many were optimistic that the Year of the Rabbit would be an improvement on the previous year, most Chinese families celebrated on a moderate scale.

In Kota Kinabalu, the State capital was quiet, with only a few business premises open.

Most political parties and leaders will host open houses tomorrow, among them Sabah Progressive Party president Datuk Yong Teck Lee at the Likas Sports complex.

In Kuching, thousands thronged the Padungan Community Centre where Sarawak United People's Party leaders held a joint open house.

The open house was hosted by State Assembly Speaker and MP for Bandar Kuching Datuk Song Swee Guan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Works Ministry Yong Khoon Seng, Assistant Minister in the Chief Minister's Office Alfred Yap Chin Loi and Kuching South City Council mayor and State Assemblyman for Batu Lintang Chan Seng Khai.

Among those present were Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, Deputy Chief Minister Tan Sri Alfred Jabu, Minister of Industrial Development Datuk Abang Johari Tun Abang Openg, Minister of Agriculture and Food Industries Datuk Adenan Satem and Federal Agriculture Minister Datuk Amar Dr Sulaiman Daud.

In Ipoh, the Year of the Rabbit was ushered in moderately but with no open houses held by dignitaries, shopping complexes and recreational parks were the favourite places to visit.

In Kuantan, 2,000 people, including Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Fauzi Abdul Rahman, attended Pahang State Local Government and Consumer Affairs committee chairman Datuk Kan Tong Leong's open house.

Also present were Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohd Khalil Yaakob, Deputy Menteri Besar Datuk Hasan Arifin, Kuantan Municipal Council president Datuk Mohamad Saib, State Rural Development committee chairman Datuk Omar Othman and Pahang Police Chief Datuk Syed Abdul Rahman Syed Abdul Kadir.

In Kangar, Perlis Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim and his wife Datin Seri Shamsiah Mohd Yassin were among the well-wishers who visited State Executive Councillor Khor Liang Tee and Perlis MCA chairman Loh Yoon Foo.

In Kuala Terengganu, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad was among the 2,000 who visited State Executive Councillor for the Environment, Health and Consumer Affairs Wong Foon at Dewan Tunku Abdul Rahman.

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