

Thousands at Chow Kit traders' grand street party

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KUALA LUMPLJR, Tues. Chow Kit bustles with activity any night, but this kingdom of hawkers and petty traders was extraordinarily lively tonight.

The focus of attraction was the Hari Raya gathering organised in Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman by the Federal Territory Malay Hawkers and Petty Traders Association in co-operation with Kuala Lumpur City Hall.

They were supported by various hawker and petty trader associations in the city.

And what a response to the event there was! An estimated 80,000 revellers from all walks of life and ethnic backgrounds turned up.

A sea of people filled much of the stretch between Jalan Chow Kit and Jalan Raja Alang which were closed to traffic, jostling and shoving their way to the food served at makeshift stalls on the pavements.

They strained for a glimpse of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, the guests of honour.

They arrived at 8.30pm to the deafening beat of the *kompang*, a lion dance and other music.

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Better facilities for hawkers

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Chow Kit was a sight to behold. The air was festive; the Hari Raya mood fed by the green and yellow *ketupat*, star-shaped lanterns and the traditional cultural show.

Dr Mahathir told the crowd that the Government would spend money to upgrade the facilities for hawkers and petty traders so that the area would not be much different from Bintang Walk.

The Government, he said, would look for suitable sites for new facilities and at the same time upgrade and beautify existing sites.

Upgrading is also on the cards for similar facilities in other major towns and cities.

"Because the people like stalls. We won't eliminate this lifestyle. Rather, we will improve upon it in line with the rapid development in the country."

Dr Mahathir urged hawkers and petty traders to keep their premises hygienic and beautiful to attract customers, and at the same time adhere to regulations set by the authorities.

Dr Mahathir received contributions from traders and hawkers amounting to RM15,000 for the Afghanistan refugees relief fund and RM48,000 for the National Flood Relief Fund.

Food and supplies worth RM2 million were also pledged to the flood relief fund.

The huge turnout left Federal Territory Malay Hawkers and Petty Traders Association president Baharin A. Razak pleased but somewhat worried. "We prepared food for only 40,000 people," he said.