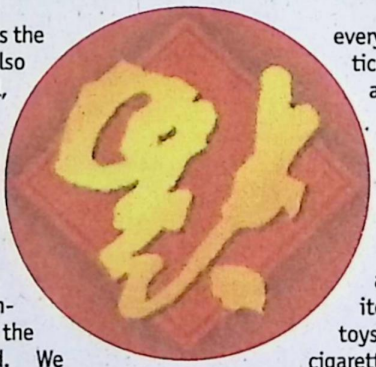
Live from China :
Chinese New Year

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THE biggest Festival of China is the Chinese New Year. It is also known as the Spring Festival, the start of the Spring season. This is the longest and most important celebration in the Chinese calendar. The Chinese year 4708 began on Februrary 14, 2010.



Chinese people celebrate this festival with lot of pomp and fanfare. We never had any idea of how the Chinese New Year was celebrated. We were fortunate to be part of this grandiose. This year, the Year of Tiger at 12 midnight on February 13-14 everything came to a standstill. Thousands of people were on the streets and all doing fireworks. There were roars of firecrackers all over the city of Beijing. You cannot imagine how noisy and colourfully lighted the city was. People were really enjoying with their family members. There were almost no cars. People were in the middle of the roads and releasing firecrackers and all kinds of fireworks were in



the sky. What a wonderful sight! There were some fireworks formally organized in designated places by the city administration, but most of it were performed by the general public. It was surprising to note that the sounds of firecrackers and fireworks went on for whole two weeks. Interesting to see that special shops only selling fireworks were set up beside footpaths in open spaces all over the city. Chinese people have a full week of holidays. They also take the second week added to their official holidays. Since it is regarded as a Family festival, millions of people move across the country to celebrate with their family members. It is a tremendously joyous occasion for everyone. During this time in China tickets for planes, buses, ships, trains are hard to find. They are sold out well in advance. Such celebrations go on throughout this huge country.

It is also a tradition to buy presents for friends and relatives. So there is a huge shopping spree and exchange of gifts. They buy items such as lanterns, clothes, wines, toys, souvenirs, cosmetics, food items, cigarettes etc. You just name it. Surprisingly the biggest item which is bought and given as gifts is cigarettes. The Chinese love smoking!

We went out at midnight to see and participate with the Chinese people in celebrating their new year. It was spectacular and we were astonished to see such jubilation. Children were having great fun with their parents and grand parents. That night continued till morning. Same things happened every night for the following two weeks. During the day time different carnivals, exhibitions, fairs, cultural performances are held in parks, temples and cultural halls. The whole city is decorated with colourful lights, banners and festoons. People walk around and enjoy the festivities. Tian An Men Square becomes a place to see, enjoy and stroll around. It looked so beautiful.

Let me share with you some of the history and traditions of the Chinese New Year and Spring Festival.

Chinese New Year starts with the New Moon on the first day of the new year and celebrations end on the full moon 15 days later. The Chinese people enjoy the two weeks of rejoicing. This happens everywhere in China, a country of more than a billion people.

Legend has it that in ancient times, Lord Buddha asked all the animals to meet him on Chinese New Year. Twelve came and Buddha named a year after each one. He announced that the people born in each animal's year would have some of that animal's personality and characteristics. Those born in tiger years are natural leaders and excel as actors, pilots, writers and managers. They are authoritative, courageous and intense.

The Chinese calendar is based on a combination of lunar and solar movements. The lunar cycle is about 29.5 days. In order to "catch up" with the solar calendar the Chinese insert an extra month once every