



Performers show a dragon dance in a night parade to celebrate Chinese New Year in Hong Kong, yesterday.

China marks Lunar New Year with prayers, incense, fireworks



Chinese are lighting incense sticks and praying at temples to wish for an auspicious start to the Lunar New Year. Thousands visited Beijing's major temples yesterday, the first day of the Year of the Rooster. Wearing heavy winter coats, they lit incense sticks and bowed as they prayed for good fortune and health. As many as 80,000 people were expected at the Lama Temple in central Beijing, state television reported.

Beijing's sprawling spring festival temple fair opened at Ditan Park, where empty tree branches were festooned with red lanterns and traditional goods and foods were for sale.

Other New Year's traditions include the eating of dumplings in northern China and the lighting of fireworks. Beijing's government called on Communist Party cadres and government staff not to set off firecrackers due to environmental con-

cerns, but local media reported air pollution levels in Beijing and several other cities still shot up Friday night and early yesterday morning. Ethnic Chinese and others around the world also marked the holiday with celebrations and visits to temples.

Large crowds gathered in Hong Kong and Malaysia on Friday night. In Rio de Janeiro, crowds watched a dragon dance and a performance of tai chi in front of a picture of Rio's famous

Christ the Redeemer statue. New York brought in the holiday with fireworks Thursday night over the Hudson River. And in Pyongyang, North Korea, a large crowd laid flowers in front of bronze statues of founding leader Kim Il Sung and his son, Kim Jong Il. — AP



Members of the Chinese community perform a "lion dance" as they celebrate the Lunar New Year of the Rooster in Kolkata yesterday.