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SUNDAY
sixth floor hall in the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka ended with a standing ovation and tears of joy for the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Some of the country's leading poets and writers had gathered there for the event, Malam Puisi Panjang Untuk Mahathir, to read their poems. Nearly all of the poems were dedicated to the leader.

In his speech after all the featured poets had had their turns, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir expressed his gratitude for all the praises and the good things that had been written about him.

He also thanked the poets for their criticism, saying that it is sometimes essential, especially in a nation that strives for perfection, to have a group of people who would not hesitate to point out the mistakes of the Government.

"Everybody can make a mistake, and even I can't hope to escape from it," he added. "After all, I am just an ordinary person."

"It is not wrong for people to express their opinions."

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir also gave his views about some of the poems, especially those that are insinuated with the allegory 'dreams'.

"Yes, I know what you meant by the word 'dream'," he told the poets. "Some say dreams can never come true, but

PM hailed by country's poets and writers

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we will do our best to achieve a little of the dream.

"I too have my dream," he said. "As you know, we live in a small developing country that has been so long, the constant subject of ridicule from the advanced nations of the West."

"It's my dream," he explained, "to eliminate and remove all the ridicule and abuse that have been thrown at us. We have to win their respects and that respect will have to come through all of us."

"All of you," said the Prime Minister, referring to the poets, musicians and writers who were present at the event, "can contribute something to achieve that respect. The important thing is to strive for perfection."

"Be what you all want to be — poets, musicians, writers or even labourers. But make sure

you are good in your work because people will respect you when you're good.

"Now, do you still want to be immersed in the ridicule and the abuse?" Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir asked.

"No, we don't," came a shout from the floor.

And with that answer, the Prime Minister walked back to his seat.

The audience rose to give him a standing ovation, and wave after wave of applause followed.

Tears were shed but for the Prime Minister, they were tears of joy.

This is the first time some of the country's poets and writers had gathered together to dedicate their poems to a Prime Minister.

"We never had such a man among us before," said Dinsman, Group Theatre Elite's director, on behalf of the other poets.