

# Federal-Kelantan divide can be bridged: Mahathir

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By T.L. Cheam

KOTA BARU, Thurs. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, using the new federal-financed Pasir Mas-Salor bridge as an allegory, hinted today that differences between the Federal Government and opposition-ruled Kelantan could be bridged.

"The Kelantan River has kept apart the people on its two banks in the past but this division is not permanent.

"With effort and ingenuity, we have built this bridge to link the people together," the Prime Minister said before officially opening the \$20 million bridge.

Among the 10,000-strong crowd present were Mentri Besar Haji Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, Works Minister Datuk Leo Moggie and Youth and Sports Minister Haji

Annuar Musa.

Dr Mahathir is on a one-day visit to Kelantan, his first in his official capacity since the Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah wrested power in the state from the Barisan Nasional last October.

He pledged to continue providing federal funds for Kelantan's development.

"The assistance is given with sincerity. Don't make a political issue out of it," he said.

He pointed out that not all the people in his Kubang Pasu constituency in Kedah supported him. "But they still benefit from the development provided."

He said it was the responsibility and obligation of any good government to help the poor by taxing the rich.

He said the bridge was built from tax money col-

lected in Kelantan but more of the funds came from other, richer states.

Dr Mahathir said the Government was striving to narrow the gap between the haves and have-nots.

"We want to distribute development to all parts of the country so that all will enjoy the fruits of our independence," he said.

In his 40-minute speech laced with symbolic references to Muslim and political disunity, Dr Mahathir won some applause with his wit.

He said the drizzle which fell in the morning had stopped by the time the ceremony began, and it had cooled the temperature "in more ways than one."

At a press conference before he returned to Kuala Lumpur, Dr Mahathir dismissed a sug-

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gestion that he had made any indirect offer to strengthen co-operation with the PAS-led state government.

Dr Mahathir said the Federal Government co-operated with all states "according to the provisions of the law."

"The ties (with Kelantan) were closer in the past as we were from the same party. Now, the relationship is one between a government party and an opposition party."

He said whatever the state of relationship, it would not jeopardise development in Kelantan.

On his feelings about meeting Haji Nik Aziz, Dr Mahathir said he did not feel anything unusual.

"I meet mentris besar all the time and I had met him (Haji Nik Aziz) before when he was a Barisan Nasional MP," he said.

He said Haji Nik Aziz accepted the invitation to attend the bridge opening "because he is the mentri besar and we had to invite him."

Asked about his views if PAS were to seek to rejoin the Barisan, Dr Mahathir said: "The question has not arisen, so we have not thought about it."