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Dr M: I'll never forget Bukit Perdana

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - "I can never forget the many events here ... there will always be fond memories of this place ...," a nostalgic Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said, looking at his office at Bukit Perdana in Jalan Dato Onn.

The Prime Minister will operate from his new office in Putrajaya from Monday.

"I feel sad ... for it is here in this place that I began, had my room and worked here the longest ... 18 years," he said after chairing the last Cabinet Meeting at the PM's Department in Jalan Dato Onn.

After being the nerve centre of the Malaysian Government for nearly 42 years since Independence, the Prime Minister's Department here would be vacated.

Today was historic for the office here, for it witnessed for the last time government decisions being made as the Federal Cabinet met within its walls for the last time.

The next Cabinet meeting on Wednesday will be held at the new seat of the Federal Government at Putrajaya 40km south of here.

The Prime Minister said even though his old office held many unforgettable memories "both sweet and not so sweet", he would nevertheless take them with him to his new office.

On the future of the building, the Prime Minister said the plan to retain the meeting room, for instance, was something good.

"There are plans for this building itself to be turned into a museum for since the time of Tunku Abdul Rahman it has been the Prime Minister's office hence there is so much history to it... from the time of Malaysia's independence."

This museum plan was only for that particular building and since it was quite costly to turn all government buildings here into museums, they would be sold instead and the proceeds would finance the construction of Putrajaya.

Only twice in 42 years was the Prime Minister's Office temporarily shifted from Jalan Dato Onn to Parliament House. The first time when the late Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak was rebuilding the Prime Minister's Department Complex and second when Dr Mahathir's office was being repaired after a fire in 1982.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today's Cabinet meeting went off as usual in the spirit of musyawarah (consultation and consensus).

All Cabinet Ministers except Defence Minister Datuk Abang Abu Bakar Mustapha and Energy, Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Leo Moggie, who were abroad on official business, were present.

Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Abdul Halim Ali, who also expressed sadness at leaving the place, which he had got used to, said the building would be turned into a gallery where all the paraphernalia and atmosphere would be retained.

The JPM office here started off as a wooden block as a Prime Minister's office was urgently needed in time for Merdeka in 1957.

It was built near the Residency which became the official residence of Malaysia's first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman who used to walk from there via the back door to his office nearby.

The Residency was the former abode of the Selangor British Adviser and

was renovated for the Tunku. Now it forms part of the Tunku Abdul Rahman Memorial Complex adjacent to the JPM Complex.

The original JPM Complex also housed the offices of the country's first Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak, Minister of Internal Security and the Economic Planning Unit (EPU).

According to the Public Works Department Annual Report for 1957, now kept at the National Archives, the JPM Complex was built in 1957 at a cost of RM248,000.

JPM administrative manager Kamaruddin Abdullah said the shift to Putrajaya which began last week would be completed in three or four days.

- Bernama

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