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Mahathir-Raya

MORE THAN 50,000 PEOPLE THROG MAHATHIR'S HARI RAYA OPEN HOUSE

PUTRAJAYA, Jan 8 (Bernama) -- More than 50,000 people from all walks of life thronged Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's Hari Raya open house at the prime minister's official residence, Sri Perdana, here, today.

The unprecedented crowd wove up its way to the banquet hall at the newly-built Sri Perdana to wish Dr Mahathir and his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, "Selamat Hari Raya".

This was the first time Dr Mahathir held his open house here. Previously, the Hari Raya open house was held at the old Sri Perdana in Kuala Lumpur.

It was also the first time that Sri Perdana was open for public viewing.

The turnout was unexpected as the food was made to cater for only about 30,000 people, Dr Mahathir told reporters at the end of the first session of his open house from 10am to 1pm. The second and final session was between 3 pm and 6pm.

"The crowd is bigger than usual," Dr Mahathir said as thousands more waited outside the hall to greet him.

He said the big crowd and their happy mood was also a reflection that the economy had recovered.

The prime minister said he believed that people came to congratulate him on Barisan Nasional's landslide victory in the Nov 29 polls as well as to view Sri Perdana.

On the people's view of Sri Perdana, Dr Mahathir said they felt it was beautiful.

"This is not my house. It is the people's palace," he said.

Asked whether the high turnout today was because the people were curious to see the new Sri Perdana after all the publicity, Dr Mahathir said: "Well, you can say the same for the mosque (in Putrajaya)."

"Thousands of people come to see the mosque because of the publicity and the waste of money that the government is accused of. So, people want to come and see how the money is being wasted.

"But practically none of them says that it is a waste of money. In fact, their comment is that they don't understand why people want to 'lelong' (auction) this," Dr Mahathir said.

The prime minister was referring to PAS president Datuk Fadzil Noor's statement last July that the party would auction off Seri Perdana if it won the general election.

Asked why he had yet to move into the building, Dr Mahathir said he was busy.

"I have not moved in yet but I have been sleeping here off and on. If there is a function here, I will sleep here," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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