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Braving sweltering heat to meet the PM

PUTRAJAYA, Fri. - A mammoth crowd braved the sweltering heat today to convey Hari Raya Aidilfitri greetings to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who steps down in October next year.

Many had brought cameras and cards, posters, T-shirts and books in a bid to get his signature.

Most had queued up since 7am although the gate only opened at 9am for what many called "the last chance" to meet him at Hari Raya in his official capacity.

V. Nalliah, a Public Bank programmer, brought his whole family to see Dr Mahathir and his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali as it was an "opportunity not to be missed".

"I made it a point for us to meet the man who has led us for 22 years. Last year, I did not get to shake his hand," he said.

He had waited in the queue to greet Dr Mahathir since 8.30am, and had brought a "special card" to thank the Prime Minister for running the country.

"I am very happy I got to meet him. May God give him the strength to continue with whatever his future endeavours are.

"We will certainly miss him."

Toshihide Nakayama, a 33-year-old Japanese working in Malaysia, said he had come to see Dr Mahathir who was "respected and famous in Japan for all he has done".

"I love Malaysia and this open house experience has been wonderful and exciting. I am glad we met him before his retirement next year," he said.

Technical assistant Tengku Norhani Tengku Hamzah was thrilled that she had managed to meet Dr Mahathir in his last year at the helm.

"I had to wait in line a long time. There were many people who fainted due to the heat... however, it was all worth it," she said, adding that she was sad Malaysia's "best Prime Minister ever" was going to retire.

Ahmad Faizal Mohd Anuar, a human resource manager, said meeting Dr Mahathir was a precious opportunity his family could not miss.

"We brought all his books, we want to try and get his signature. I am willing to spend the whole day here with him, no matter how big the crowd," he said.

Maureen Daniels, a tourist from England, never "thought it possible" to meet Dr Mahathir, and that being able to shake his hand was well worth the long queue.

"My husband and I came today specially to meet him. We love this country so much. Its people are so hospitable and wonderful.

"We have had a marvellous time and this open house concept is great as the whole of Malaysia is in front of you," she said.

Chong Set Moy, 65, was extremely happy that she had the chance to meet Dr Mahathir at the last Raya open house of his leadership.

"I had to come. I made sure I could come and shake his hand and say thank you for all he has done for the country," she said.