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Homecoming for Kedah's favourite son

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ALOR STAR, Fri. - The P. Ramlee hit song which was played over the public address system upon the return of Kedah's favourite son, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, said it all.

Di mana kan ku cari ganti? (where do I find another you?) was perhaps the question on the minds of the 10,000-odd crowd that gathered at the Sultan Abdul Halim airport in Kepala Batas to greet the Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir has made it clear he would leave office in 16 months and the people came out in full force to express their gratitude and show how proud they were of his achievements.

Among the many banners, one aptly underscored what the crowd wanted the one-time goreng pisang and drinks seller at Pekan Rabu to know.

The wording on the banner stated:

Sebab Dr Mahathir Boleh, Malaysia Boleh.

(It's because Dr Mahathir can, that Malaysia can.)

The aircraft carrying Dr Mahathir touched down at the airport at 8.55am and it took the Prime Minister almost twenty minutes to make his way up the main stage after shaking hands with the crowd.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir said he would never forget the support shown to him by the people in Kubang Pasu, Kedah and other parts of the country.

He also recited a pantun which read:

Pisang emas dibawa belayar

Masak sebiji dalam peti

Hutang emas boleh dibayar

Hutang budi saya pada tuan tuan

akan dibawa mati.

Dr Mahathir said he was indebted to the people and thanked them for supporting him in the last 21 years.

Towards the end of his speech, Dr Mahathir said he hoped people were not angry with him for breaking down when he announced his retirement plans at the close of the Umno general assembly.

"I have spent almost three quarters of my life in Umno and I felt sad to be separated from the party.

"I hope people are not angry with me as I become emotional."

Today's visit was Dr Mahathir's first to his home State after announcing his retirement plans.

Later speaking in Jitra, Dr Mahathir said he hoped Kubang Pasu would be able to produce a Thomas Cup champion someday.

He said this was not impossible considering the facilities available at a modern hall being built near the constituency.

"After all, who would have believed that a person who sold goreng pisang in Pekan Rabu would one day go on to become Prime Minister."