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Thousands turn up at Dr M's Raya open house

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PUTRAJAYA, Fri. - Celebrating what could be their last Hari Raya Aidilfitri at Seri Perdana, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali were touched by the thousands who turned up to share it with them.

The Prime Minister described it as a "bright Raya" as the people looked so happy and well.

"I look around and they look well. Nobody is starving. It is a great Raya," he said during a short break from greeting the people of all races who had queued for hours to meet him.

Saying he was "very, very positive about resigning" next year, Dr Mahathir didn't think he would miss the sprawling Seri Perdana, his official residence high on the hill overlooking the lake.

He joked that he would come back as a guest, and shake hands with the new Prime Minister.

"I have been here only for a short period, and my home is actually in Alor Star and I have another house in The Mines where I go back when I am free," Dr Mahathir said.

He felt Seri Perdana was too big and "I am not used to living in such a big house".

Dr Siti Hasmah was a tad wistful, saying she would miss the big open house which had become a feature of their Hari Raya.

She had no doubt that they would keep up the tradition of welcoming people to their home for Hari Raya, but on a smaller scale as their house was small.

She was touched by the people's greetings, and appreciated it even more as this could be the last time she would welcome them to Seri Perdana.

"They thanked us for all we had done for the country during Dr Mahathir's term as Prime Minister," she added.

Meanwhile, Dr Mahathir said his Hari Raya message to the people was that "we love peace".

"The word Islam carries the connotation (of peace) but unfortunately when Muslims are oppressed they have to fight back. It is difficult to uphold peace when Muslim land is taken away and they are oppressed."

Dr Mahathir said warring factions had to stop venting their anger and show more tolerance if there was to be peace.

Muslims, like everybody else, would like to see peace prevail worldwide, he added.

Culture, Arts and Tourism Deputy Minister Datuk Ng Yen Yen felt very emotional when she shook hands with Dr Mahathir and wife.

Ng, who brought a 25-member delegation from China to the open house, was confident that Dr Mahathir would continue to extend his experience and service to the nation.

"He has made a mark at the international level and is a well-respected leader. We marvel at him for his bluntness and his ability to stand up to the superpowers," she said.

MCA deputy president Datuk Seri Lim Ah Lek, who was also emotional about the fact that this would be Dr Mahathir's and Dr Siti Hasmah's last Hari Raya at Seri Perdana, said: "Dr Mahathir's achievements will go down in history."