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Mahathir-Raya

THOUSANDS VISIT DR MAHATHIR ON HIS LAST HARI RAYA AS PM

By: Paramjit Kaur

PUTRAJAYA, Dec 6 (Bernama) -- "This is the last opportunity I'll get to meet him as the country's prime minister," said a local visiting Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at his Aidilfitri open house at Seri Perdana here today.

A first-time visitor, sales and marketing executive Yip Weng Cheong, 35, said the only reason he came this year was to visit Dr Mahathir as the prime minister would be retiring next year.

An estimated 100,000 well-wishers of all ages thronged Seri Perdana despite the heat and blazing hot sun.

They started queuing as early as 7am to be the early birds to shake hands with Dr Mahathir to avoid the crowd. The gates of Seri Perdana only opened at about 9am.

"This is a very bright Hari Raya and everybody seems to be happy. This is definitely my last open house here in Putrajaya," Dr Mahathir told reporters after shaking hands with visitors for more than four hours.

Dr Mahathir will hold a separate open house specially for invited guest like ambassadors and VIPs at Seri Perdana tomorrow.

However, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali said that they would never stop the tradition of having open house during Hari Raya even after moving out of the Prime Minister's official residence.

"I prefer a smaller house. This house is too big for me," the prime minister's wife said.

Among those who attended the open house were cabinet ministers, political party leaders, corporate leaders and foreign dignitaries.

Indian Progressive Front (IPF) members continued their tradition of visiting the prime minister with about 300 of them, led by their president, Datuk M.G. Pandithan, turning up clad in the party's official red.

They garlanded Dr Mahathir and presented him with a gold coloured shawl.

Another visitor, M.Subramaniam, an electronics supervisor from Port Klang, said that he was visiting for the first time to personally bid Dr Mahathir good-bye before he steps down as the country's prime minister.

Purchasing officer Balwant Singh from Banting came to wish Dr Mahathir "Selamat Hari Raya" upon persuasion from his kids who wanted to see the prime minister.

On notice boards at the lobby of the official residence, there were cards from people from all corners of the country wishing the prime minister "Selamat Hari Raya".

There was also a huge stand-alone card at the lobby with wishes from the teachers and students of SK Putrajaya.

Visitors on their way out after shaking hands with Dr Mahathir were given plastic packs with Hari Raya cookies.