

Harun Idris dies at age 78

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KUALA LUMPUR: Former Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Harun Idris died of heart failure yesterday. He was 78.

His former political secretary, Datuk Mohamed Fahmi Ibrahim, said Harun died at his residence at 10, Langgak Duta, Taman Duta at 2.45pm and was buried at the Ampang Muslim cemetery in the evening.

He leaves a wife, Datin Salmah Sulaiman, and six children.

His daughter, Rozita, said her father had a stroke at about 8am and was taken to the Gleneagles Intan Medical Centre. He returned home at 2.30pm and died 15 minutes later.

Born in Petaling in 1925, Harun read law at the Middle Temple, London in 1953, and was called to the Bar in 1986.

He was instrumental in putting together the heavy-weight championship title fight between Muhammad Ali and Joe Bugner in 1975.

Harun, who was president of the Selangor Football Association for 18 years from 1961, played a crucial role in assembling one of the best state teams which won the Malaysia Cup many times.

In the 60s, Harun won the Morib state seat and was appointed Selangor's second Menteri Besar, a post he held for more than a decade before having to let go following his conviction for corruption in 1976. In 1982, he was granted a royal pardon.

Despite being imprisoned, he continued to be active in politics. In 1981, he won the Umno vice-president's post but lost in his bid for the party's deputy presidency in 1984.

Following the 1987 Umno split, Harun joined Semangat 46 the following year.

However, his bid to return to mainstream politics was sidelined when he lost in the by-election for the Ampang Jaya parliamentary seat in 1989 to Datuk Ong Tee Keat.

In 1990, he contested the Morib state seat and the Titiwangsa parliamentary seat but again lost to BN candidates.

In 1991, Harun quit as a Semangat 46 member. In May 2000, he was accepted as an Umno member.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he was indebted to Harun for bringing him back into Umno after he was expelled from the party in 1969.

"I acknowledge his contributions to Umno and to myself. Although we were not close, the fact is that he was the one who brought me back (into Umno)," Mahathir said in Bangkok, where he is attending the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who attended prayers at Harun's house, said Harun championed the rights of the Malays and the poor from other races.