

Mahathir chairs his last cabinet meeting

(SUN) 30 OCT 2003

PUTRAJAYA: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was in high spirits at his last weekly cabinet meeting yesterday, winning accolades from his ministers and pledges of support for his successor.

After posing for a group photograph here, cabinet members hailed Mahathir's leadership and expressed confidence in the ability of anointed successor Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Mahathir and his deputy will pay a ceremonial call on the Yang di-Per-tuan Agong Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin at 3pm tomorrow, where Abdullah will be formally sworn-in as Malaysia's fifth prime minister since independence in 1957.

Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said the cabinet is confident of Abdullah's "ability in carrying out

the responsibility entrusted upon him to pursue the struggles for Malaysia's better and brighter future".

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said Mahathir had expressed his thanks to all cabinet members for their support all these years.

"He hopes they would give the same support to Pak Lah," he said.

He said Mahathir also reminded the cabinet members to continue to work together to develop the country.

He expressed his appreciation of Mahathir's "leadership, firmness and boldness".

Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting hoped Mahathir will have a good retirement, satisfied with what he has left behind.

Ong, who is MCA president, gave an undertaking of the party's strong

support for Abdullah and to work as a team in the interest of the nation.

There has been a huge outpouring of praise for Mahathir, 77, in the weeks leading up to his retirement.

A generation has known no other leader, and even those old enough to remember the previous prime minister have had their lives shaped dramatically by Mahathir's 22 years in power.

Hundreds of messages have appeared in local newspapers, hailing him as a hero for overseeing Malaysia's rapid economic development and giving this small nation of 23 million people a voice in the world.

The fact that Mahathir has been widely condemned internationally since criticising Jews at an Islamic summit in mid-October appears to have served only to rally the faithful to his cause. - Agencies