

Pak Lah takes over

Sun 1/11/03
KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi took his oath of office as the country's fifth prime minister in front of Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Syed Putra Jamalullail at a ceremony at Istana Negara yesterday.

In another ceremony shortly after that, his predecessor became Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad with the conferment of the *Seri Maharaja Mangku Negara* by the king.

Mahathir's wife was also honoured by the ruler. She is now Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali with the conferment of *Seri Setia Mahkota Malaysia*, a grade lower to that of SMMN.

It was the highest national honour for Mahathir and confirmed into tradition a practice which began when a similar award was accorded to his predecessor, Tun Hussein Onn in 1981.

The swearing-in ceremony, shown live on TV, began at 3pm with Abdullah taking his

oaths of office and secrecy. He then signed the instrument of office before Chief Justice Tan Sri Ahmad Fairuz Sheikh Abdul Halim and witnessed by Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Samsudin Osman.

Abdullah, 63, takes over from Mahathir, 77, who had been prime minister for 22 years - the longest serving democratically elected leader.

Mahathir followed through on a pledge to retire made 16 months ago at the Umno general assembly.

Later, the limelight shifted to the green-domed Bangunan Perdana Putra in Putrajaya where Mahathir handed over the leadership of the federal government to Abdullah, reports Bernama.

In the historic transfer of power ceremony which was held at the Prime Minister's Office on the fifth floor, Mahathir handed over the desk file to signify the transfer of responsibilities of the high office to

Abdullah in the presence of Samsudin.

Abdullah then had a closed-door meeting with Mahathir while cabinet ministers, senior government officers and scores of ministry staff and hundreds of Putrajaya residents waited outside to bid farewell to Mahathir.

After the short meeting, a smiling Mahathir walked over to the packed lobby where he clocked out for the last time at 5.07pm, witnessed by department staff.

Abdullah then walked with Mahathir and Siti Hasmah to their car, stopping to shake hands with a mob of well-wishers.

Mahathir's departure from the Bangunan Perdana Putra was recorded by hundreds of local and foreign press photographers and TV cameramen. After seeing Mahathir off, the prime minister waved to the people present and then got into his official car.

Citizen Mahathir leaves today for an overseas holiday (*see page 2*).