

Historic farewell for Mahathir, wife

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PUTRAJAYA: It was Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's historic and longest walk out of his office when he clocked out of the Prime Minister's Office at 5.07pm yesterday.

Mobbed by some 1,000 staff from the Prime Minister's Department and other ministries, it took the retired premier and his wife, Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, 40 minutes to make their way from the lift to their Perdana 2020 car, a distance of only 30m.

They were accompanied by new Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his wife, Datin Seri Endon Mahmood.

About two hours earlier, Mahathir and Siti Hasmah were bestowed the title Tun by the King in Istana Negara after Abdullah was sworn in as Malaysia's fifth prime minister since the Independence in 1957.

The civil servants led by ministers, deputy ministers and more than 200 local and foreign journalists and cameramen had packed the Level 1 main lobby entrance leading to the prime minister's lift to send off a legend who had shaped the lives of Malaysians the last 22 years.

Both Mahathir and Abdullah and their wives arrived at the Putrajaya prime minister's building about 4.30pm.

Mahathir used the lift to go straight to his former office on Level 5. Abdullah used the entrance at the main lobby where he was greeted by the crowd lining the route to the lift.

After a simple ceremony to hand over the office to Abdullah, Mahathir made his way out.

As he stepped out of the lift, those present started cheering and reaching out for a handshake with Mahathir and Siti Hasmah.

As he placed his thumb on

the clocking in and out scanner machine, the media photographers and video cameramen lost their control and broke the lines to get the best shot.

There was a near stampede when some photographers lost their balance but

order was quickly restored.

Many women civil servants were moved to tears when both Mahathir and Siti Hasmah started inching their way out to the main lobby.

Emotions ran high at this peak time and some men and women from various min-

istries were in tears as they pushed one another just to shake hands with him.

Jamilah Ismail, a ministry staff said: "I have been seeing him for nearly twenty years. I will miss him a lot and we

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Couple close to tears

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can't find or replace a person like him."

Mahathir and Siti Hasmah were also close to tears but they managed to control their emotions as they obliged by reaching out to shake the hands of those who lined the route to their car.

In the main lobby, the couple stopped as an imam recited prayers seeking good health and long life to the Tuns. He was also overcome by emotions as his words began to break towards the end.

The couple started to walk out of the main lobby through the giant steel and glass panel gate which opens to a panoramic view of the new federal government offices, the Putrajaya Mosque and the Stealth-looking Putrajaya Convention Centre where Mahathir got the West all heated up with his "Jews rule the world by proxy" address at the recently concluded 10th Organisation of Islamic Conference Summit.

Despite the searing heat from the sun, Mahathir and Siti Hasmah continued to

oblige and happily reach out to the crowd which started clapping and cheering.

As they made their way down a 30-step flight of stairs to their car, the crowd got more excited but Mahathir and Siti Hasmah continued to oblige, with security personnel getting agitated and shoving those who lined the route for the historic send-off.

Mahathir and Siti Hasmah waved to the cheering crowd for a few minutes, shook hands with Abdullah and Endon, and got into their car.

As they were escorted out by outriders and patrol cars, the new PM and first lady also got into their BGP 13 Proton Waja Executive car.

A banner in the crowd, which reads "*Thank-you Mahathir. Congratulations Pak Lah*", says it all about legend and history.

Feng Shui observers also say it is good omen as it rained heavily last night and poured again when the new prime minister was sworn in and the King made two new Tuns.

Feng Shui masters believe rain means wealth.