

# People surge to wish Mahathir well

STAR = 1 NOV 2003

BY FARRIS BAHAROM

**PUTRAJAYA:** Thousands of well-wishers mobbed Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad as he left the Putra Mosque after attending his last Friday prayers there as Prime Minister, about an hour before he officially stepped down from office, yesterday.

His successor Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was also among the congregation at the popular "pink mosque," led by *Imam Besar* Tan Sri Datuk Sheikh Abdul Kadir Talip.

Dr Mahathir and Abdullah arrived at the mosque separately and left through different exits at the end of the prayers.

In his sermon, Sheikh Abdul Kadir touched on the significance of being blessed with good leadership and role model in a Muslim-led multi-racial and multi-religious country.

He reminded the congregation that while Man is a gregarious creature, it is wisdom in a person and the way his knowledge is used for the good of the masses that sets him apart from others.

He extended the congregation's thanks and gratitude to Dr Mahathir for his 22 years of leadership and

encouraged Abdullah to use his wisdom and resources to further enrich Malaysia.

As the worshippers left the mosque, many well-wishers gathered around Abdullah as a show of support and to congratulate him on his new post. He acknowledged the greetings with a smile and courteous nods.

Mosque officials put up makeshift stringed barricades to allow Dr Mahathir a smooth walk to the gate of the mosque, where his official car was waiting to rush him back to the Istana Besar for the swearing-in of Abdullah.

However, the barricade collapsed as the worshippers surged forward to reach out their hands to the retiring Prime Minister. Moving slowly and cautiously through the thick crowd and shaking hands with as many people as possible, it took him about 15 minutes to inch some 20m to the gate.

As he made his way out of the mosque the former premier grasped outstretched hands and stopped occasionally to drop a quiet word or two with well-wishers.

A warm smile was etched on his lips, though at times Dr Mahathir

seemed overwhelmed by sheer emotion from the sight of his supporters.

A large yellow banner with a message of thanks and congratulations borne by students of Institut Teknologi Tun Abdul Razak (Ittar) greeted him as he stepped outside.

Ittar deputy president Rohizan Zainal said the gesture was the least they could do to show their respect for Dr Mahathir.

Ittar student affairs officer Mohd Zawawi Awang and students Muhd Helmi Muhd Yusoff, 18, Mohd Rizal Ariff Sabaruddin, 22, Muhamad Khairie Malak, 19, and Mohd Hanief Hariri, 19, accompanied him.

Abd Manaf Muhamad, 49, walked solemnly away in tears as he made his way through the crowd after shaking hands with the former Prime Minister.

"It is a sad day, for me but a day of accomplishment for him.

"I feel that we are losing a charismatic and dynamic man, a Malaysian leader that stands beyond other leaders of the world," he said.

Syed Sultan Idris, 47, and a colleague whispered a prayer for Dr

Mahathir, wishing him long life and happiness.

"As a leader, Dr Mahathir is beyond compare, a man with a unique character and vision that has made Malaysia what it is today.

"I'd like him to know that I am proud of him," said Syed.

Rare among the multitude of men clambering for a look at the former PM, Jasmiah Ramlan, 45 wished him a fond farewell and *salam sayang*.

"Thank you sir, with love," she added.

Fatehy El-Turky, 55, an American travelling on business said Dr Mahathir is an inspiration to all Muslims, especially for those in North America.

"The loss of him as a leader is especially hard to take during these times. I have two children, but as Muslims, who can they look up to as role models?" asked Fatehy rhetorically.

"Pak Lah will lead his way, and he will do what is best for the country," said Azral Izwan Mazlan, 23.

"Just as Dr Mahathir did what was best his way.

"They are both great leaders and I am personally very grateful for them both," he said.