

Dr M's leaving almost goes unnoticed in US

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BY JOHAN FERNANDEZ

NEW YORK: The stepping down of former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Friday almost went unreported by the American news media.

Just over a fortnight ago Dr Mahathir was in nearly all the newspapers and on TV channels in the United States over his so-called "anti-Semitic remarks" at the opening of the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) Summit in Malaysia.

His statement that the Jews ruled the world by proxy was severely criticised by Jewish organisations and politicians, leading to the US Congress censuring the former Prime Minister.

However, when Dr Mahathir retired, there was so little coverage, though some papers continued to carry commentaries and letters from readers about his OIC address.

Only the *New York Times* featured the transfer of power on Page 3 of its Saturday edition. The lengthy article that covered about half a page of the broad-

sheet included a picture of Dr Mahathir handing over files to his successor Datuk Seri Abdullah Badawi.

Under the heading "Mahathir, Malaysia's Autocratic Moderniser, Steps Down" the newspaper credited Asia's longest-serving leader of leaving a legacy of a modern Muslim nation that he moulded on the back of often "autocratic rule" and the use of tirades intended to create national cohesiveness.

It praised Dr Mahathir for transforming an economy dependent on tin, rubber and palm oil into one of the major trading nations of South-East Asia and the exporter of most of the world's Dell laptop computers and Intel high-end processors.

It said that during his 22 years as prime minister, Dr Mahathir managed to forge a nation out of a disparate ethnic mix of a Malay majority and Chinese and Indian minorities.

Unlike the bloody ends of the reigns of Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines and General Suharto of Indonesia, Dr Mahathir's departure -

announced 16 months ago - was peaceful, the report said.

The report praised Dr Mahathir's stewardship during troubled times like the last Asian financial crisis.

It also touched on Abdullah, quoting a Western official as saying that he was expected to be more subdued and more responsive - partly due to his Islamic studies background.

It said Abdullah would retain the friendship with the Bush administration that Dr Mahathir established after the Sept 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

The Malaysian community here had mixed feelings about Dr Mahathir stepping down.

Many were already resigned to the fact that he would be stepping down, and for them his visit here last September was their chance to thank him and wish him well.

"Still it is sad to see him go. But at the same time we are glad to know that a very able and capable successor has taken over the leadership of the country," said a Malaysian who has been living in New York for 15 years.