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Mahathir-Cabinet (With pix)

DR MAHATHIR CHAIRS HIS LAST CABINET MEETING

PUTRAJAYA, Oct 29 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today chaired the 883rd weekly Cabinet meeting, his last before stepping down as the fourth Prime Minister on Friday.

Dr Mahathir chaired his first Cabinet meeting on July 22 1981 following his appointment as Prime Minister on July 16.

Prior to the meeting at 9.45 am at the Prime Minister's Office here, Dr Mahathir posed for a group photograph with the Cabinet ministers at the lobby.

Present was his successor, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is scheduled to be sworn in as the fifth Prime Minister of Malaysia at the Istana Negara on Friday afternoon.

Dr Mahathir also posed for a photograph with officers and staff of the Cabinet, Constitution and Inter-Government Relations Division at the Prime Minister's Department. They later presented him with a framed fabric with the figure '883' woven onto it.

Several ministers met earlier expressed their highest appreciation for Dr Mahathir's contributions to the nation and their confidence in Abdullah's ability to pursue the struggles for Malaysia to attain greater achievements.

Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said that Dr Mahathir had charted clearly the future of the nation through his vision.

Congratulating Abdullah, Muhyiddin said: "We are confident of his 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 Tun Razak expressed his appreciation for Dr Mahathir's leadership, firmness and boldness in making decisions which had not only been proven successful but also saved the country when faced with various challenges.

He was grateful to Dr Mahathir who had provided him guidance when he first joined the Cabinet in 1986.

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International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said that Dr Mahathir's leadership had set a strong foundation for the continuous progress of women in Malaysia.

"Without a leadership which understands the aspirations of women, there

can never be an environment which allows women to progress to a level that they have achieved today," she said.

Rafidah, who is also Wanita Umno chief, said that through the strong support of the Cabinet, leaders and the people, Abdullah would be able to continue with efforts to attain success for the country based on what had been built by Dr Mahathir.

"He is inheriting a great legacy. As such, the process now is to pursue such struggles in a more challenging environment," she said.

Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein was confident that Dr Mahathir's legacy would live on.

He described Abdullah as trustworthy, sincere and appreciates the views and sensitivities of others.

"I believe with his track record, there will not be any problem for us to pursue our agenda and to achieve greater achievements for the country in the future," Hishammuddin said.

Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Seri Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir said that Dr Mahathir had made a very significant contribution in promoting Malaysia as a tourist destination.

"Because he is well known and respected everywhere, that in itself has made Malaysia well known and respected, and tourists are also attracted to a country that they have heard of and know to be stable and prosperous," he said.

He said that Abdullah's unanimous acceptance by the component parties in the Barisan Nasional was a clear signal to the world that Dr Mahathir's successor was also strong and capable.

Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting hoped that Dr Mahathir would have a good retirement, satisfied with what he had 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.

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