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Mahathir-Departure

DR MAHATHIR DEPARTS FOR HOME AFTER ATTENDING ASEAN SUMMIT

By: Openg Onn and Salbiah Said

BALI, Oct 8 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad departed for Kuala Lumpur after attending the two-day Ninth Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) Summit which ended today at Nusa Dua, one of Bali's foremost tourist district.

Dr Mahathir and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali took off on the Royal Malaysian Air force (RMAF) special aircraft at 7.45pm from the Ngurah Rai International Airport near Denpasar, provincial capital of Bali.

Also flying home with him were Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar. He was attending the Asean Foreign Ministers' meeting held in conjunction with the summit.

They were seen off at the airport by Indonesia's Minister of Technology and Research Hatta Rajasa and senior Indonesian officials.

Also present to bid them farewell were Malaysia's ambassador Datuk Hamidon Ali and his wife, Datin Amy Hamidon, and several Malaysian embassy officials.

Dr Mahathir should have fond memories of the summit, held along the Asean+3 (China, Japan and South Korea), as this would be his last before he steps down end of this month after 22 years at the helm.

Asean leaders held a special ceremony to bid farewell to the Prime Minister who had been a prominent guiding light to the 36-year-old regional grouping during his tenure.

Indonesia's President Megawati Sukarnoputri, who holds the current chair of Asean, could not hold back her emotion and choked with sadness when reading out her speech in tribute to Dr Mahathir, a man who had carved a name as the icon of Asian politics.

He had a tight itinerary since his arrival last Monday, having to catch up with not just the summit schedule but also the bilateral meetings with his counterpart from South Korea Roh Moo-Hyun and Vietnam's Phan Van Khai, yesterday.

Last Monday afternoon, Dr Mahathir was accorded a standing ovation by over 200 business leaders and industry players when he agreed to spare his time to deliver his words of wisdom at the Asean Business and Investment Summit held at the hotel where he was staying.

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