

Boy fulfils dream to meet Dr Mahathir

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KUALA LUMPUR: "Kepada Mahathir Mohamad, berusaha dan belajarlalah untuk masa depan yang lebih cerah." (To Mahathir Mohamad, work and study hard for a brighter future.)

This was not a message written for former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

In fact, the message was from Dr Mahathir to a nine-year-old earthquake survivor from Nias island, Indonesia, who was named after him.

The boy's name is Mahathir Mohamad Domo.

Garbed in a pink *baju Melayu* and a black *songkok*, little Mahathir watched intently as the former prime minister wrote the message on a coffee table book - the appropriately chosen *Seribu Wajah Dr Mahathir* (A Thousand Faces of Dr Mahathir) - presented to the boy by *Utusan Malaysia*.

Mahathir, an orphan, met Dr Mahathir for the first time yesterday after hearing so much about the man he was named after.

At 4.30pm, the boy arrived in a Mercedes Benz C200 together with *Utusan Malaysia* group chief editor Datuk Khalid Mohd at the former premier's residence in Seri Kembangan here.

Accompanied by his guardian Yurhamun Harefa, Mahathir walked up to his host to shake his hand upon arrival while Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali welcomed him with a hug.

When Dr Mahathir asked if he felt *seronok* (excited) coming to Malaysia for the first time, the boy, appearing as shy as always, nodded with a smile.

The soft-spoken boy simply replied *senang* (which means "happy" in Bahasa Indonesia) when asked by reporters how he felt to finally meet Dr Mahathir in person for the first time.

During the meeting that lasted nearly two hours, Dr Mahathir reminded the younger Mahathir about the importance of education.

"Even though it might seem hard and you might not have enough to eat sometimes, you must always remember that studying is a must.

"We can change our destiny by studying hard," he told the boy.

He also told him to share this advice with his friends in Nias island.

Dr Mahathir said he felt happy too about meeting the boy and hoped that their meeting would benefit other orphans in the earthquake-hit area.

According to Yurhamun, the boy was named after Dr Mahathir by his late adoptive father, Ikwan Domo, who had described the former prime minister as *orang kuat Malaysia* (Malaysia's

strongman).

After Mahathir's intention to meet the former prime minister was highlighted, the Malaysian Red Crescent Society took the initiative to bring the boy to Malaysia by getting in touch with their counterparts, Palang Merah Indonesia, and the Malaysian Consul-General's Office in Medan. Malaysia Airlines provided the air tickets.

Dr Siti Hasmah told little Mahathir to be strong and to study hard to fulfil his ambition to become a doctor.