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5.5km-long banner of gratitude to Dr M

BANGI, Mon. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today received a record-breaking outpouring of public gratitude for his 22 years in office - a 5.5km-long banner bearing wishes from over 50,000 Malaysians.

The banner, certified by the Malaysia Book of Records to be the longest in the country, was presented to Dr Mahathir at the Sultan Ahmad Shah Training Institute's field here.

The project, a brainchild of Puteri Umno chief Datuk Azalina Othman Said, started in June where all 165 Puteri divisions were assigned to collect signatures and wishes penned in pink banners. (Pink is the movement's colour.)

The banners were then stitched together at the field - a task which took more than a day to complete.

Azalina, in her speech before taking Dr Mahathir on a tour of the banner in a four-wheel drive, said the project was the movement's way of expressing gratitude to Dr Mahathir who is retiring on Friday.

"The country has progressed tremendously under Dr Mahathir's leadership and it is difficult to find a replacement for him," she said.

In his acceptance speech, the Prime Minister thanked Puteri members for their efforts.

"Thank you for your gift. But I hope that when you praise a leader, you don't overdo it. Do not go to the extent of idolising the leader," he added.

He also said Puteri would play a significant role in the country but advised the wing's members to be patient and not put too much priority in contesting the general election.

With four days to his retirement as Asia's longest serving leader, Dr Mahathir, after the function, was mobbed by Puteri members eager to have their pictures taken with him and those who wanted his autograph.