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Dr M looks forward to quiet Raya

SUBANG, Sat. - Looking relaxed and cheerful on his return from Japan today, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he planned to celebrate a quiet Hari Raya with his family, something he missed for 22 years as Prime Minister.

"This time I want to celebrate. For the past 22 years I did not. I worked on Hari Raya," he said at the Royal Malaysian Air Force base here.

When suggested that it would be difficult for him to have a quiet Hari Raya as the people might still want to visit him on that day, the former Prime Minister smiled and said: "Of course, they can visit."

However, there was no mention where he would be celebrating it.

Asked how he felt now that he was not helming the Government anymore, he said: "Lega" (relieved).

When told by a reporter that, with his overseas trips to speak at seminars and conferences after his retirement on Oct 31, he did not seem to be resting despite not being the Prime Minister anymore, Dr Mahathir said: "Yes, I still go around speaking (at forums and seminars), but (the responsibility) is not the same as being the Prime Minister."

He was light-hearted during the Press conference and later obliged the photographers' request that he pose with his grandchildren.

"Okay, I will take photographs with my grandchildren, but where are they?" he said with extended arms, before walking into the VIP waiting room for a photo session with his grandchildren.

Dr Mahathir arrived to a rousing welcome by about 70 people.

Dr Mahathir went to Okinawa on Monday to deliver a keynote address at the Globalisation Forum 2003. It was his first foreign engagement since stepping down as the Prime Minister. He and Dr Siti Hasmah were on holiday in Spain prior to that.

"Terima kasih," Dr Mahathir was heard saying as he shook hands with those standing on both sides on the way to VIP waiting room.

Some reporters who were too used to his old title, addressed him as "Datuk Seri".

Looking amused, Dr Mahathir sportingly told them: "Never mind ... can call (me) Datuk Seri, after all it is longer than Tun," causing those around him to burst into laughter.