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Dr Mahathir thanks all who wished him well

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PUTRAJAYA, Fri. - On his final day as the fourth Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad today delivered a heartfelt message of gratitude to Malaysians from all walks of life for supporting him during the good and bad times throughout his 22 years at the helm of the nation.

Dr Mahathir said he managed to weather some challenging times during his stewardship of the country due to the support of the rakyat.

He said that it gave him great satisfaction to receive all the thank-you notes and letters of appreciation for his contributions to the country.

"Such gestures of appreciation and gratitude give me feel a sense of satisfaction and all these extended to me in return are greater than any other," he said at the half-hour media conference.

It was the first time Dr Mahathir held a joint Press conference with his wife Tun Dr Siti Hasmah and he was full of wit and humour as he shared his thoughts, aspirations and future plans.

The couple also shared their sentiments and feelings of being "free" after about 30 years serving the people of Malaysia.

"I also thank all those who have sent greeting and thank-you cards to me and my wife. I am not able to reply to all the cards individually so I hope that that I could take this opportunity to thank all of you. Those who sent cards, schools which came up with giant cards, signed banners and other methods to thank me for my service, I am grateful.

"All these efforts have brought satisfaction to my heart, because it is this kind of gratitude that means more to me than anything else. I also thank the people for all those letters and cards, and other methods they have taken to express this to me in conjunction with the end of my services in the Government today and the well-wishes for my retirement.

"I hope that the co-operation that has been given to me will continue with the new leadership of Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his Cabinet, and also to the Government so that we could further develop this beloved nation of ours.

"I pray to Allah that the rakyat would always be in good health to enjoy the privileges of life."

"Finally, I would once again like to express my heartfelt appreciation and thanks to the government servants, and officials and the private sector for having stood together in making our nation a success during my tenure as the Prime Minister," he said, adding that he was ready to take questions.

"That's all, if there is any questions I'm prepared to take them now," he added.

Q: What do you plan to do after this?

Dr M: I take things as they come. I will, of course, try to put down in writing some of my experiences in case they may prove useful to other people.

Q: There are expectations for you to be more vocal, in fact you have said it yourself that you will be more vocal after your retirement. What do you plan to do?

Dr M: Well, it depends upon the occasion. I must admit that I have received many invitations to speak and as the occasion rises I will give my frank opinion about things.

Q: What is the first thing that you would do tomorrow?

Dr M: Tomorrow, I hope I would be able to leave on an overseas trip to

rest for a while; don't ask me where I am going (laughs). I just want to take a rest.

Q: What is your advice for us?

Dr M: (Laughs) Just report sincerely based on truth. Don't have your own agenda and demonise other people, or try to champion your own agenda through bad ways... by writing untrue or inaccurate reports which would hurt other people, and they are not in a position to counter your reports.

Q: Many people are sad with your departure, what are your parting words for them?

Dr M: I am also sad but the fact is that I've been the Prime Minister for 22 years. It is a long time and I think it is good to have a change. Of course, I'm still able to work, I'm not saying that I'm sick or anything like that... thank God for that, but I think a change is good for the country.

Q: How do you feel at the moment and what are your plans?

Dr Siti Hasmah: I feel relieved and I appreciate that the country and people are giving back to me my husband whom I have loaned for the past 22 years, so it would allow us to be with the family more often than before. As for my activities... a lot of activities which I will have to select after returning from vacation. I will no longer be the First Lady of Malaysia and Datuk Seri Endon (Mahmood) will take over. I might remain in some international organisations as requested by my friends abroad.

Q: Dr Mahathir, one of your most remarkable traits is how you remain calm and composed during hard times, especially during the financial crisis and then the Anwar Ibrahim issue. People just wonder how you are able to keep your cool. Would you like to share your ability with us?

Dr M: Well in a way I have learned how to control my feelings from small. I told you this story of how I was afraid of dogs and then one day I decided that I'm not going to be afraid anymore. I just stopped running and I turned around and looked at the dog (killing my fears). The question of trying to control your feelings... the desire to tell secrets to people and all that to show that you know some secrets also... it is a very tremendous pressure. You want to tell people how much you know and I have to control that. All my life I've learned to control my own feelings excepting of course sometimes I do break down which is rather unfortunate.

But when faced with a crisis the only way to deal with the crisis is to look at it calmly and to find ways and means of overcoming the crisis. Of course, I appear outwardly to be very calm but my in brain things are spinning at a tremendous rate because I'm thinking all the time. I don't know whether people think I'm calm or not, sometimes I'm not so calm.

Q: What do you say to that?

Dr Siti Hasmah: Yes, I think my husband is a person who faces challenges calmly and one thing he does is that he always analyses the problem and see what is the cause and then go head to solve the problem. As you said he looks quite calm on the outside, but there were two occasions when he was not - he showed that in the form of blood-shot eyes and doing things that he normally would not do... he was going through a stressful period.

You will only see the calmness of the Prime Minister when he puts down his head on the pillow and goes to sleep. Only then you see him calm, very calm. When I see him sleeping then I know that this is the right thing to do. He has to retire... it is time. I have to thank all the people.