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Dr M: He brought me back into the Umno fold

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Political leaders today extended their condolences to the family of the late Harun Idris and described his death as a loss to the nation.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad remembers Datuk Seri Harun Idris as the person responsible for bringing him back to the Umno fold about 30 years ago.

Expressing sadness over the death of the former Selangor Menteri Besar, Dr Mahathir said Harun worked hard to bring him back to Umno after being expelled from the party for criticising Tengku Abdul Rahman's leadership in 1969.

"He came all the way to see me in Alor Star to persuade me to rejoin Umno. And he succeeded.

"I was sad for him a few years later when he was jailed for a criminal offence. But when I became Prime Minister I did what I could to get him free with a royal pardon," he told journalists in Bangkok.

Dr Mahathir said their relationship somehow drifted apart following political differences after that.

"But I must admit that he contributed a lot to Umno and I owe it to him too," he added.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who was among the first to arrive at Harun's residence in Langgak Duta to extend his condolence, said Harun had served the country tirelessly, especially Selangor and Umno.

"During his tenure as Menteri Besar, he brought much development to the State," Abdullah added.

Echoing Abdullah's sentiments, Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Abdul Najib Razak hoped Harun's sacrifices would always be remembered by the younger generation.

Another Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib, who was also a former Selangor Menteri Besar, said Harun had turned Selangor from a rural environment into a metropolis with the development of Klang, Petaling Jaya and other towns.

Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Khir Toyo said Harun's policies was the catalyst for Selangor's development and what it was today.

He had also contributed much to the development of the Malay community.

MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said he shared a good friendship with Harun and that he would be greatly missed.

"He was a good man and played a major role in the development of Selangor. I extend my deepest condolence to his family," he said.

Deputy Information Minister Datuk Zainuddin Maidin remembered Harun as a controversial politician who fought to uplift the living standards of Malays.

"Many people are thankful to him for making it possible for them to own houses in Selangor."

Harun died of a stroke about 2.45pm at his home today.