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Galeri Sri Perdana - tribute to Dr M

Deborah Loh

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Galeri Sri Perdana, the residence of former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad before he officially moved to Putrajaya, was today re-opened as a national gallery providing a glimpse into the life of the country's longest-serving Prime Minister and his family.

Launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the bungalow, perched on a hill and surrounded by greenery, has undergone minor changes and renovation, but faithfully preserved the original environment left behind by Dr Mahathir and his family.

This was evident from the way the spacious interior, wood-panelled walls, antiques and furniture arrangement looked when guests thronged the building, located on Jalan Damansara off the Mahameru Highway.

The building was handed over by the Prime Minister's Department to the National Archives.

Visitors enter through the main lobby of the house, where wedding ceremonies for Dr Mahathir's children and Press conferences were once held.

Other rooms of interest include the dining hall, where the inaugural meeting of the Umno Baru executive council was held in 1988. Here, Dr Mahathir's wife, Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali held many of her Bakti (Association of Wives of Ministers and Deputy Ministers) functions.

There is also a room called the Barber's Corner, where Dr Mahathir would have his hair cut by his regular barber.

The carpentry room showcased some of the woodwork designed by Dr Mahathir, along with his tools.

Also showcased are his reading room, the family pantry, the balcony where he and Dr Siti Hasmah would have breakfast, the master bedroom with its antique bed and wardrobe, and the children's bedrooms.

"It (the gallery) is not meant to idolise Dr Mahathir but for people to learn about his leadership from the rooms where historic events took place and the surroundings that inspired him," Abdullah said in a brief speech at the launch.

"It will remind us of our history and for those who don't know, they will better understand what had happened. Dr Mahathir would not want to be worshipped, he was always uncomfortable when people acted as if they were idolising him."

Abdullah said great leaders should be measured by how they discharged their duties, and not through buildings or monuments.

The artefacts in Galeri Sri Perdana would allow the next generation to understand something about his leadership as they would have no occasion to experience it.

"Many events have happened (in this house). If only the walls could talk ... but they cannot record history for us," he said. "What the National Archives has done (to preserve this place) is a worthy effort."

Abdullah toured the gallery, along with several Cabinet Ministers and representatives from foreign missions.

Galeri Sri Perdana was called Sri Perdana during the time Dr Mahathir and his family lived there from August 1983 until October 1999, when the new Federal Government Administrative Centre opened in Putrajaya.

National Archives director-general Rahani Jamil said Sri Perdana was originally named Sri Timah and was owned by the Malaysian Mining Corporation before the Prime Minister's Department bought it.

A short distance from the bungalow is the greenhouse where Dr Mahathir kept exotic plants, a landscaped garden and the Tasik Perdana Bird Park.

The gallery is open daily except Mondays, from 10am to 5.30pm, and is closed between 12pm and 3pm for prayers on Friday.

