

13/10/2003

Hectic schedule until year's end

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - The hectic schedule for Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, wife of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, is unlikely to ease soon as a long list of public engagements awaits the couple even after her husband leaves office at the end of the month.

Stretching until the year's end, the couple will still be very much in the public domain as they have obliged to attend endless invitations for farewell dos and other engagements in recognition of their contributions to the nation.

"My husband says that we've been invited to breakfast, lunch and dinner, everyday till the end of the year. He wants to oblige every single one of them and so would I. But in reality, this is not possible.

"I want him to retire healthy, not sick. I want to enjoy his retirement and hope everyone understands," she said in an interview with the Sunday Mail.

Dr Siti Hasmah said she would rather be at home to oversee her staff pack their belongings at the official Prime Minister's residence in Putrajaya for the move to their own home at The Mines in Sri Kembangan.

"I'm thinking of the mess in my study in Putrajaya and the staff helping to pack.

"I want to be there to supervise the packing, otherwise the staff would put everything in the boxes, even rotten envelopes, because they are so afraid to throw them away."

On whether she would miss the life of a First Lady, she said: "I've always known that this life is transient. I tell myself and I've told my Bakti ladies that as wives of politicians they will have to make adjustments when their husbands no longer hold Cabinet positions.

"And I always pray that Allah will make this transition easy for me and my husband."

Dr Siti Hasmah also hoped that the transition for her husband would be smooth.

She reckoned that Oct 31 would end like any other day, except that after office hours he would be heading for their own home.

She said the "handing over" would be a sad and emotional moment, recalling the ceremony 22 years ago when her husband took over from Tun Hussein Onn as Prime Minister.

"I remember making it a point to accompany his wife Tun Suhaila Mohd Noah all the way home. I think it's important."

On whether she expected the same from Datuk Seri Endon Mahmood, wife of Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Dr Siti Hasmah said: "It doesn't matter."

She said the main thing for her after the transition of power was to settle down, adding that her husband plans to write and travel.

Dr Siti Hasmah said she looked forward to spending time together with her husband although she was fully aware that many things still rankled her husband over what she considered his "unfinished business".

"He is disappointed with young Malay students who refuse to avail themselves to the allocations he's made, facilities he's given for their development alongside the other races. He wants them to succeed. But why haven't they risen?"

She said the one thing he was happy with was women's progress and this had nothing to do with pillow talk.

"He has Rafidah (Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz) in the Cabinet!" she said.