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Memorable time for millionth visitor to Seri Perdana

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PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - Pathmanathan Muniandy, 54, had never thought his third visit to the Prime Minister's residence, Seri Perdana, in January would make him the one millionth visitor.

Although he only knew of it six months later, the reward of being the millionth visitor was worth it.

There was no gift of cash but being able to spend almost two hours as the guest of the Prime Minister's wife, Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, and having a late breakfast with her was an experience Pathmanathan and his family would cherish.

"I was surprised to be told that I was the one millionth visitor when I took the Rotary Club District Governor 3300 on a tour of Putrajaya," said the charter president of Rotary Club Putrajaya.

Pathmanathan, who is the president and chief executive officer of animation house Astrio Sdn Bhd, came with his wife Asotha Packiry, 50, sons Navin, 26, and Anil, 23, daughter-in-law Easwari Thiagarajah, 26, granddaughter Samisha Navin, two, and a family friend, Roland Raj, 54.

They spent nearly 30 minutes chatting with Dr Siti Hasmah at the VIP living room before proceeding to the dining hall.

Dr Siti Hasmah presented Pathmanathan a framed portrait of himself taken in front of Seri Perdana.

The portrait had the signatures of both Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Dr Siti Hasmah. She also gave him two books on Seri Perdana and two hampers.

Asked what he thought of Seri Perdana and Dr Siti Hasmah, Pathmanathan, who stays in Precinct 8, said:

"Fantastic. Datin Seri is a very nice person, very approachable and informal."

Dr Siti Hasmah said she was proud there were so many people interested in visiting Seri Perdana, the residence complex built for the Prime Minister, since it was opened to the public on March 23, 2000.

"Normally, the domestic manager will prepare a souvenir for the 10,000th or 20,000th visitor, but for the one millionth visitor, we thought it is only right for us to fete him," she said.

As at Feb 28, Seri Perdana received 1,066,875 visitors. As the complex receives an average of 1,000 visitors per day, the figure would have increased by tens of thousands if it had not been closed since March for renovations to the main entrance porch.

"It is closed since March for renovations, and with the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) out-break during the same period, we have no choice but to keep the complex closed to visitors, considering that most of them are foreign tourists."

She added that it would be up to the Prime Minister's Department to decide when it would be reopened.

Asked whether she would miss receiving guests when Dr Mahathir retires in October, Dr Siti Hasmah said:

"Of course, I will miss meeting with people. I will still be meeting people, but much less."

She said she was relieved that the 54th Umno general assembly last week went off smoothly.

She was happy there were no surprise motions at the assembly and also over the Prime Minister's ability to control his emotions and being able

to deliver his last speech calmly.

"I did not expect him to control his feelings so well. I am happy the assembly ended the way we wanted it to."

Dr Siti Hasmah said she was worried there would be a motion to persuade Dr Mahathir to stay on as Prime Minister and Umno president after October.

The Prime Minister had announced his decision to retire from all his government and party posts at the Umno general assembly last year.

After being persuaded by senior Umno leaders, the Prime Minister agreed to postpone his retirement to October this year.

Dr Siti Hasmah said the Prime Minister did not tell her earlier about his intention to step down.

But she said she fully supported his decision to retire as she felt that it was about time he did so.