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Pak Lah's efforts earn Dr M's praise

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ALOR STAR, Mon. - Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad today praised Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi for his untiring efforts in continuing to develop the nation.

The former Prime Minister said his successor was hardworking and willing to visit the people at as many places as possible.

"I see that he is very hardworking and willing to visit many places although it is the fasting month.

"This proves he feels duty-bound to shoulder the Government's burden in ensuring continued development for the nation," Dr Mahathir said on his first trip back to Kedah since retiring on Oct 31.

He urged the people to continue supporting Abdullah.

"We now have a new leadership under Datuk (Seri) Abdullah. I hope everyone will give him the support so that he can bring about greater success to the people," he said when asked if Abdullah had sought his opinion on any matter since he became Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir had earlier arrived at the Sultan Abdul Halim Airport in Kepala Batas on a government-owned Falcon DA-90.

He and his wife, Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, were greeted by about 5,000 people.

Leading the welcoming party were Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain, his wife Datin Seri Sharifah Hamidah Syed Hamid and other VIPs.

Decked in party colours, BN members and supporters waved placards and banners to welcome the couple.

Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah took more than 25 minutes to walk the short distance from the plane to the terminal as there were many people including children who were eagerly waiting to shake hands or to present small gifts.

The couple then made a brief stopover at their home in Titi Gajah before heading to Pekan Rabu for a spot of shopping before proceeding to the Felda Laka Selatan mosque, in Changloon about 40km from here.

There, Dr Mahathir who is the Kubang Pasu Member of Parliament, handed out donations to 300 orphans and widows from the Tunjang State constituency.

Dr Mahathir also received a "Thank You" scroll from the pupils of Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Hosba.

The couple then joined 3,000 people in breaking fast before performing the maghrib and terawih prayers at the mosque.

Earlier, asked about the reception accorded him at the airport, Dr Mahathir said he was touched by the large turnout.

"I am touched...although no longer the Prime Minister, there are still many who showed up to welcome me.

"Anyway, I am coming home ...although not for long because I will return to Kuala Lumpur since I have stayed there for a while."

In jest, he added: "Some of my friends here are daif (old and sick) ...some are suffering from lelah (breathing difficulties)."

Nevertheless, the former Prime Minister said he viewed the reception as a positive sign that the people were still strongly supporting the Government.

"This is also a good sign for Umno and the Barisan Nasional in the next general election since it shows that although one is no longer in power, the people still give their support."

Dr Mahathir also said judging from today's turnout, the people showed that they were thankful to the Government.

"Some of them said terima kasih (thank you) while others said 'Thank you for all that you have done'. The people are generally grateful.

"Those who are not grateful ...well, that is something else.

"Most of the people are grateful and thankful since they have benefited from the development brought about by the Umnoled Government."

Asked on his intention to help Kedah in the general election, Dr Mahathir said he would come at the right time.

"I will meet the people ...as many people as possible to explain to them so that they will not be misled by those with vested interests.

"This is my responsibility. In fact, the people had helped me during my early days in politics. Now, I want to repay their deeds."

On the political situation in Kedah, Dr Mahathir said the State has improved a lot. In 1999, referring to the country's 10th general election, he said some people had exploited a certain issue.

"As such, many people were confused and they included Umno supporters and members.

"It was as if the Government was cruel. But now, many of them have realised and fully understood the situation and I am confident they will continue to support Umno and the Government."

On Pas' attempts to mislead the people, he said the Opposition party had no leadership qualities while its leaders were only out to manipulate Islam for their personal interests.

"They only use religion to secure cushy jobs, allowances and be a wakil rakyat."