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Spirited but sombre welcome for Dr Mahathir

A SPIRITED but sombre Bersatu Bersetia Berkhidmat accompanied what would be the last time Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad raised the Umno flag to start the party's annual general assembly.

The sounds of rebana ubi from a City Hall band and kompang from Persatuan Kompang and Silat Seni Ezhar Gombak greeted Dr Mahathir as senior party leaders welcomed his arrival at Menara Dato' Onn.

The Prime Minister, in light purple baju melayu, inspected a guard-of-honour comprising Wanita Umno, Umno Youth and Puteri Umno brigades.

He was accompanied on his tour of the 171-member brigade by Wanita Umno chief Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein and Puteri Umno chief Azalina Othman Said.

Dr Mahathir then proceeded to raise the party's flag at the centre of the Menara Dato' Onn Plaza Merdeka courtyard, to the songs of Bersatu Bersetia Berkhidmat and Umno Teras Negara, presented by a choir of students from Kuala Lumpur secondary schools.

He was joined by party deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob and executive secretary Datuk Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor.

The party president was then led into the Putra World Trade Centre by party vice-presidents Datuk Seri Najib Razak, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib.

He took 20 minutes to reach the Merdeka Hall where he delivered his speech, due to the large number of people that crowded the hall to catch a glimpse of their beloved leader who will step down as Prime Minister and party president in October.