

## World News

### **Mahathir quits, Abdullah takes over**

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Agence France-Presse

KUALA LUMPUR – The end of an era was marked in Southeast Asia Friday as the region's longest-serving elected leader, Mahathir Mohamad, stepped down and Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was sworn-in as Malaysia's prime minister.

In contrast to Mahathir's often controversial 22 years in office, the formal hand-over of power was performed with quiet dignity in a nationally-broadcast ceremony before King Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin at the royal palace in Kuala Lumpur.

Abdullah, 63, took the oath of office as Malaysia's fifth prime minister since independence from Britain in 1957 as Mahathir, 77, followed through on a pledge to retire first made 16 months ago.

After the ceremony the two men were due to travel separately to the prime minister's office in the new administrative capital of Putrajaya south of Kuala Lumpur.

At 4:45 p.m. Mahathir was due to clock out, using the punch card system he introduced for civil servants a month after becoming prime minister in July 1981.

On Monday, Abdullah will clock in at 8:15 a.m. after spending the weekend in his home state of Penang.

Mahathir's last day as premier was marked both by bouquets and brickbats, as were his two decades in power.

Local newspapers published massive supplements of lavish praise for the outgoing premier, but he was snubbed by Australian Prime Minister John Howard and criticized by the United States congress.

Howard said in a radio interview he had no farewell message for Mahathir, who has regularly dismissed Australia's bid to be accepted as part of Asia, describing it recently as "some sort of transplant from another region."

In Washington, the House of Representatives joined the Senate in condemning Mahathir for his remarks at an Islamic summit in mid-October that Jews rule the world by proxy.

Mahathir acknowledged in one of his final news conferences that his legacy was a controversial one.

Asked how he would like to be remembered, he said he did not mind if he was forgotten, but added:

"They will not forget all – as Shakespeare has said, 'the evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones'."

The "good", though, was the focus of Friday's media tributes, one of which described Mahathir as "the greatest Malaysian alive."

Echoing the grudging acknowledgement of even his critics, the New Straits Times said: "No one can dispute his central accomplishment of transforming Malaysia from an agricultural backwater into a rapidly industrializing economy and manufacturing powerhouse."

Mahathir has been accused by some in the West of being a dictatorial Muslim bigot, but he has run a moderate multi-religious country and stepped down voluntarily with a democratic system, though criticized as flawed, still in place.